



# THE DESTRUCTIVE ELEMENT

A Study of Modern Writers  
and Beliefs

BY

STEPHEN SPENDER



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TO ROSAMOND AND WOGAN

## NOTE

I AM particularly indebted to Miss Theodora Bosanquet, Lady Ottoline Morrell, Miss Janet Adam Smith and Mr Herbert Read for their assistance in making it possible for me to write the first part of this book, about Henry James. My thanks are also due to Mr T S Eliot, who drew my attention to the importance of Hawthorne as an influence on James, to Mr Lincoln Kirstein, the editor of *Hound and Horn*, who gave me some details about James's illness, to my uncle, Mr J A Spender, to Miss W E Paine for making the index, and to Mr Isaiah Berlin and Mr William Plomer for helping me with the proofs.

Where I have used quotations that have to my knowledge been used by other commentators, I have drawn attention to both sources. This does not mean that I am quoting from someone else's quotation, but that I am aware that my quotation has been used previously.

When my use of material is most controversial, as in the essays on Wyndham Lewis and Max Eastman, I have given full references. I have not weighed down the essays on James with such marginalia, because it is scarcely likely that the reader will want to turn to my exact quotation, and the references are sufficiently indicated in the text. Also, I have used the earlier edition of *Roderick Hudson*, not the revised version published in the Collected Edition.

Some extracts from these pages have appeared in *The Criterion*, *Hound and Horn*, *The London Mercury*, and *Left Review*. Acknowledgements are due to the editors of periodicals, and also to Messrs Macmillan, Cassell, Secker, Faber & Faber, Chatto & Windus, and The Hogarth Press for permission to quote from books published by them.

PART ONE

HENRY JAMES



## INTRODUCTION

IN this book I have taken Henry James as a great writer who developed an inner world of his own through his art. I have also tried to show that his attitude to our civilization forced him to that development. The process had two stages. The first was his conviction that European society—and particularly English society—was decadent, combined with his own despair of fulfilling any creative or critical function in civilization as a whole. Secondly, he discovered, in the strength of his own individuality, immense resources of respect for the past and for civilization, he fulfilled his capacity to live and watch and judge by his own standards, to the utmost.

It is not only the characters he created that are specialized—all examples, as he willingly admitted, of the 'special case'—it is also the institutions, rather than the class, which he described. All the time he transforms his material with a subtle and concealed anachronism. He exploits the realistic tradition of the novel by making his real, highly select subject matter, unreal on another plane, his aristocrats, his millionaires, are given, in fact, an overdose of Power. The power, the social significance which they possess, does not exist in the modern world, it is imbibed from history, from the cities of France, and from Venice and Florence in particular.

On these lines I have defended James from the generally accepted dismissals of him. If he is a snob, he is a snob for this reason: that he is imposing on a decadent aristocracy the greater tradition of the past. His characters have the virtues of people who are living into the past: an extreme sensibility, consideration for, and

curiosity about each other's conduct, in aestheticism of behaviour. In some ways their lives are a pastiche, but the pastiche is an elaboration of traditional moral values of love and respect. The life that James is, on the surface, describing, may be false, the life that he is all the time inventing is true.

These considerations may put James in a different light from that in which most readers see him. This is a light which illumines several writers, of whom he is the greatest. Take James, then, is the greatest of a line who owe more to an un-English (i.e. Celtic and a Continental) tradition than to the purely Anglo-Saxon one. Joyce, Yeats, Ezra Pound and Eliot. These writers have all fortified their works by creating some legend, or by consciously going back into a tradition that seemed and seems to be dying. They are all conscious of the present as chaotic (though they are not all without their remedies), and of the past as an altogether more solid ground.

I. A. Richards, in his important essay *Science and Poetry*, adding a footnote to his pronouncement on *The Waste Land* (the full version of which appears in the second edition of *Principles of Literary Criticism*), quotes from Conrad 'In the destructive element immerse. That is the way.' T. S. Eliot, he implies, has thus immersed himself. Since that essay was written, while one may doubt whether T. S. Eliot's immersion was total, one sees also that others, whether or not they have decided to have a dip, were immensely conscious of the destructive element. One sees this in Pound's *Maunderley*, in Yeats's

'Things fall apart, the centre cannot hold,  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned,'



in James's grand, final, epistolary gasp at the outbreak of the war 'To have to take it all for what the treacherous years were all the while really making for and *meaning*, is too tragic for any words'

The idea for a book on James gradually resolved itself, then, in my mind, into that of a book about modern writers and beliefs, or unbeliefs, which turned again into a picture of writers grouped round the 'destructive element,' wondering whether or not to immerse themselves. But if one has eventually immersed himself, there are also others who seem to be making a fine show of emerging at the other side

The difficulty of a book about contemporaries is that one is dealing in a literature of few accepted values. At best one can offer opinions, or one can try to prove that one living writer is, for certain reasons, better than another. At worst such criticism degenerates into a kind of bookmaking, or stockbroking. Certain living critics have made wide reputations as bookies, brokers or dictators. For the step from the literary tipster to the Book Society dictator is not wide. I have read, for example, in a Tasteful study of contemporary poets, a carefully reasoned chapter explaining why the critic believes that Walter de la Mare is unlikely to develop further in his poetry, another chapter explaining which, exactly, are the dozen or so poems by Thomas Hardy that are worth reading. This seems to me not criticism, but, strictly, impertinence. A living writer as great as de la Mare does not decline in accordance with rules laid down by donnish minds: at most it is a bet with various odds, long or short, to say of any good writer that he will write no more good poetry. A dead writer of genius had reason for writing in the way he chose, and the 'common reader' is at liberty to pick his way among Hardy's poems, per-

haps guided by the critic, but not dictated to by him. Impertinent criticism means, that the critic is projecting on to writing some fantasy of his own as to how poems should be written.

My aim, then, in the arrangement of this book, is to establish my one very great writer as my chief value, and then allow the others to fall into their places. The great writer is James: he is firm enough to stand strongly as a central figure. The next problem is to make a bridge between James and the younger writers who are now our immediate contemporaries. I attempt this in the second section. Yeats and Eliot are both traditionalists, they are individualist writers, but they are also extremely aware of contemporary problems. In his latest poetry Yeats has revolutionized his style, his power of observation seems to have undergone the same kind of change as one finds in James's last, unfinished, novel, *The Ivory Tower*. Lawrence, on the other hand, compared with these other writers, is a kind of traveller to uncharted lands. As a psychologist, in his poems, and in *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, he is in many ways ahead of all our contemporaries. As a descriptive writer he is unique and has no follower, so that his achievement takes us beyond the writers of my last section.

All these writers seem to me, faced by the destructive element, that is, by the experience of an all-pervading Present, which is a world without belief. This situation is accurately described by I. A. Richards, who finds in *The Waste Land* the expression of the predicament of a generation. This account of the poem is perhaps too final, but the predicament seems to me real, so that I. A. Richards's pronouncement may, in a sense, be taken as complementary to T. S. Eliot's poem. *The Waste Land* released the comment that really applied and applies to most of the serious literature of this century. We may take

## INTRODUCTION

the pronouncement as a focal point from which diverge rays towards the past and the future. On the one hand there are the writers who search for some unifying belief in the past or in some personal legend, on the other, those who (like characters in Chekhov's plays) look forward to a world of new beliefs in the future. Both of these attitudes are explained by the consciousness of a void in the present.

This book is not written in defence of any particular set of beliefs, because I myself have adopted them. What interests me here is what writers write about, the subjects of literature to-day. So that in the last section I am not defending the young writers from the old writers, I am defending what is, in the widest sense, the political or political-moral subject in writing. To me the lesson of writers like James, Yeats, Eliot and Lawrence is, that they are all approaching in different ways, and with varying success, the same political subject. Their task may sometimes seem impossible, for in the chaos of unbelief the time lacks, or has seemed to lack, all moral consistency. Nevertheless, certain statements have been made. I have tried to elucidate the statements in *The Golden Bowl* and *The Wings of the Dove*. The statements in *The Waste Land* and in some later poems of Yeats are far barer. In the case of Lawrence, as the various biographies go to show, a bare account of his life would be a valuable illustrative account of the moral life of our time. His own books are, indeed, descriptions of his experience, and the writing is so inextricably bound up with the value he set on living, that it seems a part of the experience, it does not seem at all cut off from his life. In a word, what I want to indicate in the work of all these writers is what James called the 'Figure in the Carpet', which is the 'organ of life'. And the organ of life, which is the moral life of human beings, is the subject, the consistent pattern, through all of these books.

After I have said all this, the fact remains that the main difficulty of these writers was a technical one. I have described the process by which James's art was driven inwards, how in order to write about his political-moral subject he was compelled to adopt a technique which deprived him of a large audience. Lawrence also was hampered by the 'realistic' tradition of the English novel. Only at the end of his life in *The Man Who Died* did he attain the form which was most suited to his subject, a form like that of a parable, in which he was able to combine his brilliant gift of visual description with the peculiar imagery of prose poems, which, in an ordinary novel like *The Plumed Serpent* seems out of place and almost grotesque. Yeats, too, only in his last work has attained a lyrical form suited to his contemporary subject, and, as yet, in his longer work he has been compelled always to return to the romantic subject, where the background of a personal legend gives his work a unity which is lacking in the unbelief of the present time. Eliot's struggles with Tradition involve him in an attempt to solve technical difficulties in his own poetry; to write a poetry which represents the modern moral life, and which is yet not isolated from tradition.

My approach to writers in this book becomes, in a way, progressively and deliberately more and more superficial. I try to explain the technical development of James, how he revolutionized the method of presentation in the novel; altering the emphasis from the scene to that intellectual and imaginative activity which leads to the scene, so that his scenes are symptoms, not causes, always anti-climaxes, not climaxes, in the sense that any explosion, any breakdown of nervously accumulating forces is anti-climatic. It is necessary to relate this to his actual view of life, to the figure in the carpet. In Yeats I see a fundamental

division of the realist, from the practical politician and mystic, the reporter attending séances I see Eliot as an extremely isolated artist of great sensibility, whose work at one moment, in *The Waste Land*, achieved a wide objectivity, but his poetry narrows on the one side back to *Prufrock*, on the other side forwards to *Ash Wednesday* and *Marina*. To say this is not necessarily to attack it, because it was an extremely isolated, a deaf, and a neurotic sensibility that produced the great Quartets of Beethoven's last period. Eliot's criticism I argue with, because I regard it as an elaborate rationalization of his position, an attempt to objectify his situation as a poet, which simply exists, and does not need defending. The defence involves him in making statements which call for discussion. I end this section with some notes about D. H. Lawrence. This essay is necessarily incomplete, because I do not wish to repeat things which have been said better by others, and a great deal has been said about Lawrence. This whole middle section is an attempt to explain the position of certain writers, without becoming involved in technical discussions.

The last section is an argument. All these writers I have been discussing have really the same moral-political subject as the centre of their work. The attitude may be centrifugal as in James, because James believed that the only values which mattered at all were those cultivated by individuals who had escaped from the general decadence of Europe. But, before everything else, the individual must be agonizedly aware of his isolated situation, nor is he to be selfish, he is still occupied in building up the little nucleus of a real civilization possible for himself, and for others possessing the same awareness as himself.

More recently, however, the situation seems to have

profoundly altered, because the moral life of the individual has become comparatively insignificant. In times of revolution or war there is a divorce between the kind of morality that affects individuals and the morality of the State, of politics. For example, in time of war the moral or immoral purpose invented by the State is to beat the enemy, and the usual taboos affecting individuals are almost suspended. Those taboos which serve to make the individual conform to a strict family code may become regarded as almost ludicrous. In revolutionary times it is questions of social justice, of liberty, of war or peace, of election, that become really important. Questions of private morality, of theft, of adultery, become almost insignificant, in private life there remain few great saints, and absolutely no great sinners. The old question of free will, of whether the individual is free to choose between two courses of action becomes superseded by another question. Is a society able to determine the course of its history?

Society is, of course, made up of individuals, and the choice, if there is any, lies finally with individuals. But there is a difference between public acts and private acts of individuals. There is a difference between the man who considers that he is a great and exciting sinner because he leads a promiscuous sexual life, and the man who decides not to live too promiscuously, because to do so embarrasses and complicates his revolutionary activities. To the second man the question of a morality in his private life becomes a matter of convenience, whereas his political conscience governs his actions.

In times of rest, of slow evolution and peace, society is an image of the individual quietly living his life and obeying the laws. In violent times the moral acts of the individual seem quite unrelated to the immense social changes going on all round him. He looks at civilization

and does not see his own quiet image reflected there at all, but the face of something fierce and threatening, that may destroy him. It may seem foreign and yet resemble his own face. He knows that if he is not to be destroyed, he must somehow connect his life again with this political life and influence it.

The subject of these great individualist writers, our contemporaries of the present and the recent past, was the moral—or in my wide use of the word—the political life. That is the subject of the most important art of our time. I am trying to show that it must still remain the most serious subject for our literature. The extraordinary public events of the last few years, the war, revolutions, the economic crisis, are bound eventually to become absorbed into the tradition of literature, they are going to be the Figure in the Carpet.

Here, in certain events, the war, the revolutions, is the subject, after that, as I have shown in my other examples, the immense difficulty of the technical problem begins. But the technical problem will only be solved if we realize that the moral subject exists. It is not true to say that poetry is about nothing, poetry is about history, but not history in the sense of school books, a history which is the moral life, which is 'always contemporary'. And the pattern, the technique, is the organ of life.

So that in this third section I find myself opposed to the distinguished critic who says that art is or should be non-moral and non-political, but external and satiric, as much as I am bound also to oppose those who say that literature should become an instrument of propaganda. What I am asserting is that the greatest art is moral even when the artist has no particular moral axe to grind. Conversely, that having a particular moral or political axe to grind does destroy art if the writer (a) suspends his own judge-

ments and substitutes the system of judging established by a political creed, (b) assumes knowledge of men and the future course of history, which he may passionately believe, but which, as an artist, he simply hasn't got

I am committed then to a theory of communication that the poet is not dealing in purely æsthetic values, but that he is communicating an experience of life which is outside his own personal experience. He may communicate his own experience, yet he is not bounded by that, but by his understanding. If I am answered with theories of pure art, I would reply that pure poetry does communicate a kind of experience, and that this is the experience of a void. For the sense of a void is a very important kind of experience. All theories of art for art's sake, and of pure art, are the attempt to state the theory of a kind of art based on no political, religious or moral creed. Certain symbolist poems succeed in being 'pure,' because they communicate an experience which is really a void of experience, something static, lifeless and immovable. But in order to achieve this they depend on certain associations and sequences in our minds which they deliberately set out to destroy. But unless these sequences and associations existed, they would achieve nothing. There could be no 'free association' if there were not a tied association, there could be no Gertrude Steinism if there were not a time sense. Such writing is essentially a phase, a void between two worlds. It is, again, the literature of the 'destructive element.'

'The old gang to be forgotten in the spring,  
The hard bitch and the riding-master,  
Stiff underground, deep in clear lake  
The lolling bridegroom, beautiful, there'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> W. H. Auden, *Poems*, No XVI (Second Edition)



Lastly, I am not stating how writers should write, or even what they should write about. That is their business, not mine. I am only suggesting that the sufferings of Henry James's over-perceptive characters, in particular, the sleepless and choking nights of Maggie Verver, found expression in the physical suffering of the war. Maggie was, as it were, haunted by the ghosts of the future. James was a very great artist if only because the suffering of his characters was not born of self-pity, it was an intuition, and it was true. His artistic creations have a kind of awareness which is deeper than his own consciousness, they knew what the years were all the while *meaning*. And we, in these later times, are inundated by the meaning. It is the business of certain writers not to escape it.





romantic inventiveness to observation of outer reality, the romantic symbols of his first period will be used as symbols for the newly discovered reality. We find this in Yeats's later poems. If, on the other hand, he begins with observation, fragments of what is observed will be used as symbols for presenting the inner life.

Thus James's later books, even where they are least realistic in their content, are imbued with imagery which is derived from realistic observation, just as dreams, expressing the desires censored by our waking thought, figure those desires in pictures which are actual to us. For example, in *The Golden Bowl* the relationship between Charlotte and the prince is in Maggie's distressed mind 'like some wonderful, beautiful, but outlandish pagoda, a structure plated with hard, bright porcelain, coloured and figured and adorned, at the overhanging eaves, with silver bells that tinkled ever so charmingly, when stirred by chance airs'. This realistic picture of a collector's piece in her father's house has become to Maggie a symbol, at once terrible and beautiful, of her unhappy situation.

Thus we find in his early books a museum full of the symbols which were at first observed as conditions in real life, and which, in the later books, were used as symbols for different states of mind.

James was impressed by wealth and display of a kind which even to-day impress intelligent and sensitive Americans travelling to Europe, which, indeed, impress Europeans themselves, by Venice, Rome, and all Italy, Paris and the French landscape and towns. He hated Germany. What overwhelmed him in Europe was the sense of tradition, a Continental tradition which was not only unknown to America, but which, in literature, was foreign to the English language. The French tradition

was not only what he saw with his eyes, but also *Madame Bovary*, Balzac's novels and the stories of Maupassant. There were also the people he met—the aristocrats, and the literary society of Paris. And his invitations to parties at English country houses.

In his early work he is obviously rather overwhelmed by his impressions. Parts of *Roderick Hudson* read like a tourist guide to Rome. *The American* sometimes reads like a guide through a forest of French family trees.

From the moment James observed Europe, it therefore became certain that the most important symbols of his work would be impressions forced on him by families of ancient lineage, by the survivals of a great artistic tradition, and by the leisure and the displayed self-expression of wealthy people. The misery of the poor and struggling served chiefly as a stage background to the magnificent scenery and dramatic figures which immediately caught his eye.

His view is therefore limited. He is writing, essentially, as a foreigner. And, as one realizes, if one reads the account of his father in *A Small Boy and Others*, he is not even really an American. He was brought up to despise everything in America, and he was fed on dreams of Europe, so that his outlook was really, from his childhood, cosmopolitan. This explains still further his passion for tradition.

He restores the balance in his 'traveller's' picture of Europe by a stroke of honesty amounting to genius, in setting the American tourist right in the foreground of his early novels. Until he had mastered his European material, he made the central theme of his early novels what he later termed the 'International Situation'. The 'International Situation' became a method of approach which he abandoned when he wrote the series of novels

and stories beginning with *The Awkward Age*. He returned to it in his three great novels, *The Wings of the Dove*, *The Golden Bowl*, and *The Ambassadors*. The method is made clear in a letter which he wrote to his brother William in 1888: 'I have not the least hesitation in saying that I aspire to write in such a way that it would be impossible to an outsider to say whether I am at a given moment an American writing about England or an Englishman writing about America (dealing as I do with both countries), and far from being ashamed of such an ambiguity I should be exceedingly proud of it, for it would be highly civilized.'

Although James's earlier books are much fuller of descriptive writing and *rapportage* than the later books, the angle of vision is limited in both. As an artist, James came to realize the advantages of this limitation, and he used his thematic material at its simplest, the most limited theme is capable of the greatest development and variation. In his later books, those descriptive passages, which tended to sameness and repetition, were dropped, and he concentrated on developing and making intricate his themes.

In these books it is possible to see through the façade of descriptive writing and external observation, not only to the theme of the 'International Situation' which was the first step in his development, but also to the *motifs* of the later novels.

*Roderick Hudson* is the story of a young American sculptor who is taken from his home in Boston by a rich young man called Rowland Mallett, who hopes that the influence of European art will give the fullest release to his genius. The experiment ends disastrously, the effect of Europe on Roderick is to destroy his creative gift and to reveal his character as weak, egoistic and irresponsible.

The relationship between Rowland and Roderick provides the book's greatest interest. It is the relationship of the protector and the protégé which recurs often in James, and it is also the relationship between a person who is an artist in his work and the person who is an artist in life. If we view Rowland and Roderick as a sort of personality, we have, indeed, an aspect of James himself, because James combined in himself the person who like Rowland was the spectator at the edge of life, always refusing to enter into it, and the sculptural artist that Roderick might have been. Roderick is a projection of James's worst fears about his own future as an artist. James shows pretty clearly that his sympathy is with Rowland, who does not participate in life, and that he considers him even to be the better artist.

'Without flattering myself,' writes Rowland, 'I may say that I'm cursed with sympathy—I mean as an active faculty, the last of fond follies, the last of my own.' 'Sympathy as an active faculty is there in most of James's work. Where his scientific impartiality prevents him from revealing any attitude to his characters, he will sometimes flood them with doses of sympathy which are his nearest approach to sentimentality, and which certainly amount often to querulousness. We pour endless sympathy over Milly in *The Golden Bowl*, over Maggie in *The Wings of the Dove*.

Another effect of James's so definitely siding with Rowland is that the spectator, the person who does not participate, the often feminine presence of a second Henry James, is projected into most of the novels. In *Roderick Hudson* there is a cousin of Rowland called Cecilia to whom Rowland writes. So that Rowland has his own sympathetic spectre—his other Rowland—whose only business in life seems to be to watch his affairs. A

similar rôle is played by Mrs Tristram in *The American*, by Maria Gostrey in *The Ambassadors*, by Mrs Assingham in *The Golden Bowl*, to mention only a few names, the list is indeed formidable. These characters are all really versions of Rowland, they all listen and talk and comment, and do not act, they all represent, in his most feminine aspect, Henry James himself. Quite apart from their value as choruses to his drama, James was interested in the conception of life without action. *The Beast in the Jungle* is the study of a man in whose life nothing happens, it is all spent in waiting for the beast to spring. *The Altar of the Dead* describes two people, typical Jamesian spectators, whose eyes are turned always to death, because the hero of the drama which they were watching has died before them. And these characters are really studies for Strether in *The Ambassadors*, who, in his epic six months in Paris, learns of everything called 'life' that he has missed in his fifty-five years.

James lived the life of one of his Rowlands or Mrs Tristrams. Until middle age he travelled in Europe, living longest in England and Italy, such a life of leisured and comfortable journeys to frequented and beautiful cities or parts of the country, is, in the majority of cases, the most uneventful life our society has to offer. If it provides excitement, it provides excitement with the least possible amount of friction. Shortly after he was fifty, at Rye, he 'settled down,' which is the phrase we use of ships when they are about slowly to sink. He was always comfortably off. At one time he supplemented his income with a certain amount of literary journalism for high-class American periodicals. In politics, he was a Liberal of the most respectable brand. He stayed in country houses, went to dinner parties and entertained his friends.



The personal conflict to be detected in James's early work is a conflict between the desire to plunge too deeply into experience and the prudent resolution (leading, perhaps, to a certain prudishness) to remain a spectator. In two of his early stories, *The Passionate Pilgrim* and *The Madonna of the Future*, the overwhelming effect of Europe on American travellers is described. In both stories the creative activity of their heroes is reduced to torpor, because they are intoxicated by their sense of the tradition.

The problem that faced James was to absorb the tradition of Europe and the tradition of English and French literature, without losing his own individuality as an American, and in his work the virile influence of Hawthorne. He could choose between two kinds of isolation: the isolation of a person so deeply involved in experiencing the sensations of a world which is foreign to him, that he fails strikingly to affirm himself as a part of its unity, that was the isolation of Roderick Hudson. 'The great and characteristic point with him was the perfect separateness of his sensibility. He never saw himself as part of a whole, only as the clear-cut, sharp-edged, isolated individual, rejoicing or raging, as the case might be, but needing in any case absolutely to affirm himself.'

The alternative which James chose was to be isolated in the manner of absolutely refusing to be an actor in the play which so impressed him. His belief was that by understanding he might see himself as 'part of a whole.' For the purpose of understanding he was armed, not with his brother William's power of abstract thought, but his own imaginative creative gift, and with 'sympathy as an active faculty.'

He was not interested in 'men of action.' In his early work he was fascinated by the artistic temperament. At

At a later period he wrote stories about problems connected with the creation of literature. What he was always really aiming at was to create characters who were artists in life.

Rowland, in *Roderick Hudson*, is not in any acknowledged sense an artist. Yet his attitude to Roderick is exactly that of an art critic to some 'find'. He is a sort of art critic who writes home letters about Roderick.

There is a sudden exclamation from another character, Christina, the exotically attractive temptress of Roderick, which explains very clearly what was already James's artistic aim in creating character.

'What, then, have you dreamed of?' (asks Roderick)

'A man whom I can have the luxury of respecting!' cried the girl with a sudden flame. 'A man whom I can admire enough to make me know I'm doing it. I meet one, as I've met more than one before, whom I fondly believe to be cast in a bigger mould than most of the vulgar human breed—to be large in character, great in talent, strong in will. In such a man is that, I say, one's weary imagination it lost my rest, or may wander if it will, but with the sense of coming home again a greater adventure than any other.'

Strether, in *The Ambassadors*, is a character answering to Christina's description. But the characters in whom the imagination may most freely 'rest and wander' are the women of the later novels, such as Maggie Verver and Milly.

There are also flickers of what James would call a 'fine moral agitation,' an interest in the complexity of social life, the light and shadow on its surface. 'Very odd, you may say, that at this time of day Rowland should still be brooding over a girl of no brilliancy, of whom he had had a bare glimpse two years before, very odd that an

impression should have fixed itself so sharply under so few applications of the die. It is of the very nature of such impressions, however, to show a total never presented by the mere sum of their constituent parts.' The last sentence has an air of self-importance which seems a little irrelevant to the book. But it is relevant to James's later heroes, who are doomed for ever to be reckoning up such 'sums'.

All that Roderick represented, the element of violence in James's work, was a hard ghost to lay. We have to reckon with the fact that, as always with great æstheticians, there is a certain vulgarity in his work, and this vulgarity found its expression in violence. It is vulgarity of a kind that we never find in the work of coarser writers like Fielding, Smollett and Lawrence, but which we always are conscious of in writers like Flaubert, or Jane Austen, or Wilde. The classic example of such vulgarity is *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

I do not think, as has often been maintained, that James is vulgar because he was a snob. He understood that very small section of European society which interested him, far too well to be able to write any account of it which was not, in effect, a crushing indictment. He may have been 'knocked off his perch' by the drawing-rooms of the aristocracy, but he nevertheless saw the crack in 'The Golden Bowl,' and, indeed, went so far as to smash the bowl. Not only does a story like *The Spoils of Poynton* show this, but in his letters he is quite explicit. Writing to C. E. Norton in 1886, he says. 'The position of that body' (he is referring to the English upper class) 'seems to me to be in many ways very much the same rotten and *collapsible* one as that of the French aristocracy before the revolution—minus cleverness and conversation, or perhaps it's more like the heavy, congested and depraved

Roman world upon which the barbarians came down' When the war came, it is true that James became an English citizen and adopted the conventional trumpet note which blew so grandly from most of the writers who were 'over age' at that time. This was partly because he had always hated Germany and looked on the Germans as the enemies of the Latin civilization whose tradition he loved and lived for. But there is also the realization of a certain consistency in the war in these lines. 'The plunge of civilization into this abyss of blood and darkness by the wanton feat of these two aristocrats is a thing that so gives away the whole long age during which we have supposed the world to be, with whatever abatement, gradually bettering, that to have to take it all now for what the treacherous years were all the while really making for and *meaning* is too tragic for any words.'

The vulgarity is not explained by his superficial snobishness or by any ethical failing. The key to it is, in the earlier novels, in his attitude to the body and to the sexual act. In the last novels his attitude is quite altered, and his extreme individualism has enabled him to accept much which before he would have rejected with horror. It is not that he ignores the sexual act, on the contrary, it plays a very important part in many of his novels *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl*, and even, to a large extent, *The Ambassadors*, are novels about sexual subjects. The vulgarity consists at first in the sexual act being regarded as the merest formality, and secondly, in the later novels, in its being nearly always presented as if it were base.

One of the earlier stories, *Madame de Mauves*, is an account of an idealistic American woman whose romantic ambition is to be married into an old French family. She marries an aristocratic Frenchman, and then discovers

that he is an egoist and a cad. A young American man who visits her comes to realize the extent of her unhappiness. Her husband, who is 'carrying on' with a Frenchwoman, cynically proposes to the young American that he should sleep with Madame de Mauves. But Madame de Mauves is faithful to her idealism even when in practice it has betrayed her. She sends him away. He hears some years later that she also discovered the infidelity of her husband, who repented and fell deeply in love with her, but her disgust with him was such that finally he shot himself.

Apart from the absurd ending, this story is told in a way that is moving and beautiful. Its weakness is caused by what I take to be the trait of vulgarity in James's mind. Not only is Madame de Mauves rightly portrayed as being extremely cold, but her American admirer seems to be several degrees colder. When the suggestion has been implied, rather than made, that Madame de Mauves should become his mistress, we are told that he 'was conscious of no distinct desire to "make love" to her, if he could have uttered the essence of his longing he would have said that he wished her to remember that in a world coloured grey to her vision by the sense of her mistake there was one vividly honest man'. The sense of this is sympathetic, if it means that he wished to remain faithful to her idea. But it is worth noting that the very idea of making love has been put into inverted commas, as though it were somehow ridiculous and vulgar. Monsieur de Mauves' behaviour, is, of course, boorish and objectionable, but as we read on we begin to wonder whether the horror with which the young American seems to regard the whole topic of physical love is not even more repulsive. We do not feel that his respectability is due to any Christian code of

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morality, it is simply the horror it imposing any vulgarity on Madame de Mauves. James's characters tend to be pagans tempered by an upper-class sense of respectability. We find that the very thought of a possible 'happy ending,' in which Madame de Mauves and her lover could frankly enjoy each other, is rather disgusting. In fact, although James's characters are full of moral passion, and certainly of a passionate regard for each other, in his early novels his lovers are not lovers.

His attitude to sex varied greatly in the course of his development. In the early novels and stories, with the exception of *The Princess Casamassima*, wherever James approaches the physical side of life he seems to draw on his gloves, and his nouns draw on their inverted commas. When his subject is sex, he sheers away from it by reducing it to a formality, and if one tries to imagine his characters physically, one feels that one is lifting a veil which conceals something repulsive. Here the vulgarity lies in the tastelessness of what is artificial when a comparison is forced with what is natural. The most obvious symptom of his uneasiness is in his occasional indulgence in the purely melodramatic, which, in the first books, strikes such a surprisingly false note, until, in *The Spoils of Poynton*, by an astonishing *tour de force*, he succeeds in making a work of art out of a series of violent episodes.

In the books of the middle period, in which James is preoccupied with problems of form, his attitude to sex seems to have taken refuge in fantasy. There is a strange ambiguity about the intention of such books as *What Maisie Knew* and *The Awkward Age*, and about stories like *The Pupil* and *The Turn of the Screw*. It is difficult not to conclude that a rather infantile repressed sexual curiosity governs the extraordinary convolutions of *What Maisie Knew*, and that *The Pupil* is a fantasy about

homosexuality In the Henry James number of *Hound and Horn*,<sup>1</sup> Mr Edmund Wilson, the author of one of the best books of contemporary criticism, *Axel's Castle*, has worked out in great detail a theory that *The Turn of the Screw* is a story of the repressed sexual delusions of the governess who is the narrator If so, the sexual imagery is amazingly well worked out The valet, whom she sees, appears on a tower, and is dressed in the clothes of the master, with whom she is in love The governess, her predecessor and rival, always appears behind a lake of water Every detail is correctly Freudian The only difficulty is that if the imagery were worked out consciously, it is hardly likely that James would have anticipated Freud with such precision The horrible solution suggests itself that the story is an unconscious sexual fantasy, or that James has entered into the repressed governess's situation with an intuition that imposed on it a deeper meaning than he had intended

In the later books, the sexual *motif* reappears in what are really amazing forms Firstly, in *The Ambassadors*, the essential fact that Chad is living with Madame de Vionnet is accepted by the American traveller, Strether (the type of spectator that most interested James), with the force of a revelation Secondly, the heroine of *The Wings of the Dove*, Milly, is a martyr to the brutal virility of Kate and Densher, and to her own refusal or inability to enter into their world of health and normality Lastly, in *The Golden Bowl* all these elements are fused, and instead of one being offered the familiar Jamesian spectacle of the single isolated person in conflict with the intrigue of nature and marriage, one is offered a conflict between two different sorts of marriage The book leaves no doubt that James considered the relationship

<sup>1</sup> *Hound and Horn* Henry James Number, April to June 1934.

of the father and daughter, Maggie and Mr. Verver, as a marriage, which was interrupted by their each marrying, and thus entering into a conflicting pair of marriages outside their own relationship. It so happens that the two outsiders, the two people to whom the father and daughter are married, are also living together, and thus a grotesque conflict is set up between the spiritual, platonic marriage, and the marriage by nature of the two adulterers.

It is difficult not to conclude that there was some conflict in James's mind on the subject of sex, which may explain much about him. His unwillingness to face certain aspects of reality may partly explain the withdrawal of his art from the objective world, until he had created a world of his own, in which it was possible for that reality to appear either in a form in which it was beautifully accepted (as in *The Ambassadors*), or in which it was 'shown up' in its full horror.

In an article by Mr. Glenway Westcott in the same number of *Hound and Horn*, a reference is made to a rumour which persists in America 'Henry James, expatriation and castration,' and again, 'Henry James, it is rumoured, could not have had a child. But if he was as badly hurt in the pre-Civil War accident as that—since he triumphed powerfully over the other authors of his epoch—perhaps the injury was a help to him.' There is another reference to the accident in Miss Rebecca West's little book on James. Apparently he was called on as a volunteer to help with a fire engine to put out a bad fire. There was an accident, in which he was very severely scalded. In his letters he refers to an injury from which he suffered all his life.

Whether the accident was as serious as has been maintained, or how it affected James, is now comparatively



unimportant But his attitude to sex, whatever its origin, is important because it may also account for the prevalence of death as an ending to his stories Castration, or the fear of castration, is supposed to preoccupy the mind with ideas of suicide and death<sup>1</sup> There is a type of Jamesian character, Roderick Hudson, and all the Millies and Maggies—there seem to be many of them—and Hyacinth, and Owen Wingrave, and the children in *The Turn of the Screw*, and the boy in *The Pupil*, whom it is impossible to regard except in the light of death The preoccupation with death is so emphatic that it is difficult to remember that, as an exception, Maggie Verver did not die, at the end of *The Golden Bowl*

In the ten years preceding the publication of *Roderick Hudson*, his work was at its most melodramatic There is a full description of the stories he published at this period in Mr Beach's *The Method of Henry James*, published by the Yale University Press Most of these stories seem to have been extremely violent Mr Beach writes of one of them, called *De Grey a Romance* 'Feeling and expression are always in the superlative degree The hero "cries out in an ecstasy of belief and joy" The heroine "turns deadly pale" People rush madly, precipitately—and more than once Piercing shrieks resound through the house A face "gleams through the darkness like a mask of reproach, white with the phosphorescent dew of death!"' Henry James was twenty-five years old when he wrote this story, so it cannot be regarded as the outpouring of an adolescent It is the crude ore of a violence, sexual in origin, which is never very remote from James's novels, however smooth their surface

*The American*, which was published in 1887, a year

<sup>1</sup> The rumour of castration seems exaggerated and improbable, but it seems likely that James sustained a serious injury

after *Roderick Hudson*, is a mature work, but it is Elizabethan in its mechanism. It is a story of a middle-aged but vigorous, self-made American, who travels to Europe, and in Paris tries to make a prosperous marriage with the aristocratic daughter of a great French family. With her he eventually, and rather incidentally, falls in love. The family, tempted by his money, first of all accept him, and then, finally, turn him down. The daughter, who loves him, submits to her family, but refuses to marry anyone else and finally buries herself in a convent.

The thin thread that gives the book its continuity and much of its excellence, is (as James explains in the preface to the complete edition), the character of Newman, the American. In the violence of his disappointment, Newman stumbles on a scandalous family secret. He comes into possession of a paper written by his fiancée's father on his death-bed, proving that he was killed by her mother. Newman has his opportunity of revenge. He toys with the luxurious idea of exposing the whole antique twelfth-century rotten family. But eventually (this is the rather youthful conception that struck Henry James while he was seated in or on an American horse-car) he burns the paper and goes back to America.

Newman is certainly a grand figure, but most of the other characters in the book are curiously ineffective. Valentin, the attractive younger son of the aristocratic family, is an exception. He is a far livelier figure than his sister, and his relationship with Newman is far more convincing and more passionate than Newman's relationship with her. In the same way, in *Roderick Hudson*, the relationship between Rowland and Roderick is more real to us than is the relationship of either with his girl friend. Moreover, the women in James's early books are far too conscientiously drawn, when compared with his men,

who seem more spontaneous. That James was perhaps conscious of this deliberation is shown in both the title and the whole manner of *The Portrait of a Lady*. A third of this book is taken up with brush-work which has nothing to do with the story, but much to do with James's determination that he would really present Isabel Archer to us.

Apart from the character of Newman, *The American* is made memorable by certain very dramatic scenes, and by flashes of profound psychological observation. It is this psychological insight which makes the total effect of the decrepit, proud, destructive old family far more real than the character of any one of its members. The Marquise de Bellegarde attempts to kill her husband by not giving him the dose of medicine which will revive him after he has had a stroke. He faints, but recovers. When he is better, but still very weak, she comes back into the room.

'She came up to the bed and put in her head between me and the Count. The Marquis saw her and gave a sound like the wail of a lost soul. He said something we couldn't understand, and then a convulsion seemed to take him . . . The Marquis was stone dead—the sight of her had done for him.'

The way in which this is related is perhaps rather absurd, but the underlying meaning is not at all absurd. The great firm, European aristocracy, Versailles peopled with ghosts, seem purely destructive to the hearty, healthy intruder, who is made to see himself as a barbarian. It is a strange contrast with the later novels, where James takes often the side of the aristocrats whom he regards here as dead, with *The American*, which is so like it in many ways, where Stretton the American, is fighting against his compatriots for the French family. In the earlier book the French aristocratic family speaks the

language of death. It repels the inflow of new American life, and it even suicidally refuses the money which might revive its splendour.

All the family are dead, or ghosts. The Marquise destroys her husband's life and the happiness of her daughter. The attractive but purposeless younger son is killed in a farcical, anachronistic duel. The daughter, because she attempts to escape from her death at home, is self-condemned to a living tomb, for that is Newman's vision of a Carmelite convent. The remaining members of the family are living corpses.

In *Roderick Hudson*, Roderick comes to Europe and dies because he is surfeited with all the things that were new and rare to him when he was exiled from them in America. In Europe, he is drowned by the excess of riches. In *The American*, Europe resists the invader and he returns to America, having witnessed the suicide of a great and ancient family. This triumph of the barbarian may have given James the same sort of compensatory satisfaction as Lawrence got from describing the seduction of an aristocrat by a gamekeeper. In *The Portrait of a Lady*, the American, Caspar Goodwood, with all his crude virtue, fails to recapture Isabel from Osmond, who represents another and shallower but sinister aspect of Europe.

The death theme in Henry James's work has a significance which extends far beyond that of the 'International Situation'. In the first place, as I have pointed out, it probably has a bearing on his own psychology. Secondly, it is part of a tradition derived from Hawthorne, and extending far beyond James into a great mass of modern imaginative literature. The debt of contemporary literature to Hawthorne is made clear in Lawrence's essay on *The Scarlet Letter*, in his *Studies in American Classical*

*Literature* In a typical Hawthorne novel such as *The Blythedale Romance*, there are all the typical properties of an early James story or novel. There is Priscilla, the weak, suffering, simple orphan, who is easily imposed on by the designing, unscrupulous, healthy, sexual, intelligent, slightly vulgar, Zenobia. The narrator is a poet of rather weak character who is constitutionally incapable of participating in any way in the lives of the other characters, much as he would like to do so. There is a passionate crusading 'reformist' character, Hollingsworth, who is anxious to build a home for converting criminals. He is the grandfather of characters like Caspar Goodwood, or like Waymarsh in *The Ambassadors*. Most significant of all, is the atmosphere of death which pervades the whole book. It is clear enough that in order to be good and beautiful you have to live on the spiritual plane. In order to do that you renounce the struggle against nature, and you fall a victim to healthier, less scrupulous and more primitive people. Actually, in *The Blythedale Romance*, it is the healthy Zenobia who commits suicide, but the point is, that if she had not done so Priscilla would have died. If James had written *The Blythedale Romance* he could not have accepted the sanguine view of a providence that killed Zenobia and spared Priscilla. This New England puritanical view of life pervades James, and is the crudest explanation of the moral feeling behind the deaths of so many of his characters. It is a harsh, logical, unscrupulous puritanism—quite unlike the English respectable puritanism which simply ignores three-quarters of life. The classical American puritanism, on the contrary, hunts out and persecutes the physical side of life. It follows that the good people are those who are most successful in thwarting their physical desires, they therefore fall easy victims to people less disastrously

preoccupied, unless, indeed, quite unaided, they manage to kill themselves by contracting some nameless internal disease, particularly consumption. But James differed from Hawthorne in being a puritan who did not believe in the puritan morality.

Not only is this view of life the background of James's novels, but American literature seems never to have escaped from it. For instance, it is violently apparent in the novels of William Faulkner. There are symptoms of it even in Hemingway, although the heroine of *A Farewell to Arms* expresses only what one might term a 'veiled purity,' in being less dissipated than the other characters in the book. Their dissipation is also an inverted puritanism. One does not have to search far for puritanism in T. S. Eliot.

The psychological attitude of much modern literature, especially that of D. H. Lawrence, is implicit in the little scene in *The American*, in which the Marquise de Bellegarde, by an act of the will, murders her husband. The over-developed, destructive, perverse, egoistic will, is the instrument which destroys the Bellegarde family, which prevents them from sharing with an instinctive pleasure the new forms of life (American life) outside them.

At the beginning of *The American* there is a curious passage in which Newman describes how he came to throw up his chance of making more money in America, and to decide on his travels.

'The idea of *not* coming by that half-million in that particular way, of letting it utterly slide and scuttle and never hearing of it again, became the one thing to save my life from a sudden danger. And all this took place quite independently of my will, and I sat watching it as if it were a play at the theatre. I could feel it going on inside me. You may depend upon it that there are things going on inside us that we understand mighty little about.'

So that the vitality of Newman is of a kind which is opposed to that concentration of an egoistic will which makes the Bellegarde family so hang on to every shred of their decayed grandeur, and which, in circumstances which he rejected, could have established him as a tenacious, self-made man

Newman is alive and solidly real, because he is not completely either made or on the make. He is aware of, and to some extent guided by, the movements of an energy within himself which is larger than his conscious will. He is, in an almost crude sense, a worshipper of life. Although he is not cultured, he has taste and a high standard of social behaviour. He is incapable of the homicidal tastelessness of the Bellegardes, because he is innocent, and therefore his natural humanity is incapable of gross tastelessness. The old English nurse and caretaker of the family likes him as she would like a child. In the final issue he is always capable of falling back on the illumination of that 'idea' which saved him from that extra half-million, and which set him wandering along the galleries of the Louvre. He is, in fact, a romantically conceived figure, James's version of Rousseau's savage. He is as sharply contrasted with the figures of the Bellegarde family as is broad daylight with the obscurity of the night.

We come now to *The Princess Casamassima*. Christina Light, the exotic traveller from *Roderick Hudson*, marries a prince and becomes a princess in the book which is named after her. She continues her career of charm and destruction, and in this book the person whom she helps to destroy is a young man called Hyacinth, the illegitimate son of an earl by a prostitute, who is brought up by a seamstress.

James explains in the introduction how he came to

write this book, partly because he was not satisfied with his treatment of Christina in the earlier novel, and partly as the result of 'the habit and interest of walking the streets' in London. The conjunction of Christina with the 'great grey Babylon,' results in a brilliant book, quite unlike any other book he wrote, a book in the broad English tradition of Dickens and Thackeray.

The moving and realistic description of the life of Miss Pynsent, the seamstress, and her charge, of their visit to the prison where Hyacinth's mother lies dying, of the people who surround them, of Mr Vetch, the old violinist, and lastly, of the young revolutionaries whom Hyacinth joins. All these things lead one to believe that James is really attempting to give a picture of the whole London scene. But when we meet Lady Aurora, the delightfully typical Socialist aristocrat who devotes her life to working, in a crazy way, amongst the poor, and then the Prince and the Princess, we realize that we are only looking at the same aristocratic setting from the wings.

Yet the observation of political types in this book is remarkable, and curiously undated. Hyacinth, with his strong leaning towards the upper classes, and yet his feeling that he is somehow committed to the cause of the workers, might to-day have become a Socialist Prime Minister, who, at the height of his power, would dismay his followers by too frankly going over to the other side.

Paul Muniment, Hyacinth's friend, is a true revolutionary type. He has the egoism, the sense of self-preservation, the cynicism, of a person who identifies himself so completely with a cause that he goes through life objectively guarding himself from all approach, as one might preserve for the supreme event a very intricate and valuable bomb. Paul certainly seems to betray



Hyacinth when he becomes a captive of the Princess Casamassima, yet one has a feeling that James does him less than justice and that he withheld in himself reserves of revolutionary interest

Another character, the Cockney girl, Millicent Henning, is the most sensual of all James's women. She is a thorough Londoner, and yet she has the physical vigour of some woman off the streets of Rome, as she moves through the book with a Southern freedom of speech and gesture

In fact, James went further in the way of observation in this than in any other book. For once, he painted in the whole background of the International Scene. After this, he certainly recorded new types, and new phases of society, such as that represented by Gabriel Nash in *The Tragic Muse*. The Oscar Wilde type interested him in the same way as did the Coleridge type, which he recorded so brilliantly in *The Coxon Fund*, or the Shelley type whose ghost haunts the pages of *The Aspern Papers*. But these were, after all, only new manifestations of the social world which so intrigued him. Even his stories about childhood are only new ways of holding up the mirror to the upper class, or sometimes to what one might call the pseudo-upper-class, which interested him at one time still more, in such studies as *The Pupil* and *What Maisie Knew*.

The theme of *The Princess Casamassima* is essentially the same as that of *The American* and *Roderick Hudson*. It is the death of a society. Here, indeed, it is seen in an inclusive form, for not only is the society, which the Princess forsakes in her search for life, implicitly decadent (even the gesture of forsaking it is a typical symptom of belonging to it), but the revolutionaries themselves are suicidal. The intrigue in which Hyacinth finds himself caught, is an assassination as pointless as the duel in which

Valentin (in *The American*) is killed Hyacinth himself is a feeble revolutionary, and his existence as a bastard makes him a living contradiction in terms of class The friend on whom he relies seems to go over to the other side, and, at any rate, betrays him

In these novels of James's first period, we see him at work observing European society, and we are able to read into his conclusions. After the publication of the last of them, *The Tragic Muse*, for three years he took to writing for the stage Then followed the beginning of the retreat of his work into a world of inner experience

## II

# LIFE AS ART AND ART AS LIFE

described and the life which he now began to invent from his own inner experience is clearly enough explained in the preface to the volume of stories about artists, called, in the Collected Edition, *The Lesson of The Master* 'Whereas any anecdote about life, pure and simple, as it were, proceeds almost as a matter of course from some jog of fond fancy's elbow, some pencilled note on somebody else's case, so the material for any picture of personal states so specifically complicated as those of my hapless friends in the present volume will have been drawn preponderantly from the depths of the designer's own mind.'

From the same depths are drawn *The Awkward Age*, *The Spoils of Poynton*, *The Aspern Papers*, *The Turn of the Screw*, *What Maisie Knew*, *In the Cage*, and many other of the stories of this period, especially what he called the 'nouvelles,' as distinct from the short stories which are more in the nature of the anecdote.

The relation of these nouvelles to the school of his experience is interesting, because the seed of most of them was some real occurrence. James tells in his prefaces how in conversation he would hear the allusion which was the 'germ' he would not listen for more than the germ, because to hear all, impeded the creative process that had already started in his mind. He describes how one such allusion from the lady seated next to him at a dinner party, gave him the idea of *The Spoils of Poynton*. 'There had been but ten words, yet I had recognized in them, as in a flash, all the possibilities of the little drama of my *Spoils*, which glimmered then and there into life, so that when in the next breath I began to hear of action taken, on the beautiful ground, by our engaged adversaries, tipped each, from that instant, with the light of the highest distinction, I saw clumsy Life again at her stupid work.'



exception of Yeats, who was then a young man), and his little for art only superficially resembled theirs. They were fighting for a unique and exemplary, pure and original gesture of 'Art for Art's sake'. He was fighting, like Eliot in our time, but in a more comprehensive, genial way (I believe), for traditionalism. Some of his critical observations quite strikingly resemble certain remarks of Eliot in his essay on *Tradition and the Individual Talent*. One is his comment to W. D. Howells on the prefaces which he wrote for the Collected Edition of his works: 'They are, in general, a sort of plea for Criticism, for Discrimination, for Appreciation on other than infantile lines—as against the so almost universal absence of these things, which tends so, in our general trade, it seems to me, to break the heart'. Then there is his account of *The Altar of the Dead* in his preface to the volume named after that story: 'The sense of the state of the dead is but part of the state of the living,' which reminds one of Eliot's remark about the dead writers: 'Precisely, and they are that which we know'.

What distinguishes James from the aesthetes is his extraordinary sense of life, as distinct from reported experience. Writers like Wilde and Lionel Johnson, and even Whistler, were so deeply embroiled in various sensations and memorable experiences, that it was natural for them to think of Art as something cut off from life. James had nothing of what they would call life, life to him was as much a separate activity from his own life as Art with a big A. He therefore had a reverent disinterested sense of what life was, because his approach to it was not through his living, but through his art. He is one of the very few artists who, when he talks of 'life,' makes one feel that he means something which cannot be instantly replaced by some word such as 'sex,' or

'business,' or 'success' His art for him was only valuable because it was the means of creating life And to the thesis that applied to himself that art was life, there followed the antithesis that life was art, which accounts for so much of the characterization in his later work, where he described people who were artists in creating their own, and in their approach to other people's lives

*The Figure in the Carpet* is the story of a novelist of genius who meets a young man interested in making a critical study of his work He tells the young man that there is in all his work 'an idea without which I wouldn't have given a straw for the whole job It's the finest fullest intention of the lot, and the application of it has been, I think, a triumph of patience, of ingenuity' This secret of his work is called 'the figure in the carpet' The young man fails to discover the secret, and the author dies without revealing it

A great temptation is afforded, because in many of James's books there is a pattern, an arrangement of symmetry in the plot, which governs the lives of his people We are reminded of his description in the preface to *The Awkward Age* of how when he was explaining to the conductors of *Harpers Magazine* his plan of the book. 'I remember that in sketching my project I drew on a sheet of paper the neat figure of a circle consisting of a number of small rounds disposed at equal distance about a central object The central object was my situation, my subject in itself, to which the thing would owe its title, and the small rounds represented so many distinct lamps, as I liked to call them, the function of each of which would be to light with all due intensity one of its aspects' This arrangement resembles the extremely complex arrangement of the parents and step-parents in *What Maisie Knew*, so that one gets there a small

✓ algebraic system If one imagines the parents as A and B, and their respective lovers as X and Y, then Maisie is free to work out all the possible combinations, AB, AY, XY, and BX, of the symbols, which she does, with an almost fiendish intensity Or the distribution of marriages in *The Golden Bowl*, made possible by the grotesque social inconsistency that the relationship of the rich Mr. Verver to his daughter Maggie is, in effect, marriage.

Yet this finding of patterns is too crude and obvious and elaborate to satisfy the very simple conditions of Hugh Vereker's figure If we look for the analogy in James's work, there is one remark in the story which does provide a clue. 'What I contend that nobody has ever mentioned in my work is the organ of life'

The organ of life is, in fact, the whole complex system of James's middle and later work, the method of indirect presentation, or 'his rummy manner,' as William James called it. He is—to an extent quite unprecedented amongst novelists—a creative artist, and what he maintains he was creating by his peculiar method of approach, is life The clue is that precisely those principles in his work which seem to us at first most artificial, the imposed mathematical pattern, the perversely forced symmetry, create a pattern and an unity (the 'organ of life') which is fundamental, where personality and character lie on the surface In order to understand this, one must forget all the standards by which one compares James's novels, which are, as it were, creating by their organic unity the whole process of life, with novels of annotation and observation, which are recording manners and imitating characters and the symptoms of a social life

The best analogy to James is not to be found in prose writing at all, but in poetry or music, more particularly in



music James's phrase, 'the organ of life', obviously could be applied to Beethoven's Third Symphony, or, in a sense more easily comparable with James, to some elaborated work with constant suggestions of something in nature which is mysteriously indicated—perhaps something French—like César Franck's Symphonic Variations. It is impossible to understand what seems the unnecessary complexity, the specialized characterization, the forced intellectual interest, of a book like *The Golden Bowl*, unless one realizes that the nature of this art is symphonic, that it most nearly resembles music.

The musical analogy holds again and again. Precisely the beauty of such stories as *The Aspern Papers* and *The Turn of the Screw* is that one finds in them a rare, inaccessible and pure poetry which reminds one of the music of Gluck. Consider also the uses of Paris in *The Ambassadors*, the effect of the town against the characters is like the contrast of a vast subterranean orchestra against the single leading instruments of a concerto.

Fortunately, James's manner of composition is clear to us, as the notes of two of his unfinished novels have been published. These notes convey a feeling, not of the observation of life, not of *rapportage*, but of the creation of living, pressing forms of life. To grasp the whole pattern, to breathe all the excitement, and to follow all the difficult yet urgent thematic arguments, one has to read these notes. They remind one of Beethoven's sketch books, or of his account, reported somewhere, of how he heard a theme and lost it and then pursued it unceasingly, until it was clear. Here is a passage from the notes of *The Sense of the Past*, where the young American traveller from the modern world tells his secret to his charming eighteenth-century cousin.

'He breaks down under the beautiful pity of her divination, the wonder of her so feeling for him that she virtually knows, or knows enough, and the question is here, of course, isn't it? That's what it comes to, what it *has* come to, very much indeed it would seem, that's what the situation would seem to mean, would appear to have to give, as who should say, of finest their being face to face over all the prodigious truth—which I think there ought to be a magnificent *scène à faire* in illustration of. The beauty, the pathos, the terror of it dwells thus in his throwing himself upon her for help—for help "to get out," literally, help which she can somehow give him. The logic, the exquisite, of this to be kept tight hold of, with one's finger on every successive link of the chain. But *voilà un peu* the logic, which, expressed in the plainest, the most mathematical terms possible, is that what this "retributive" admonition signifies for him is, he feels, that he is going to be *left*.'

Then there are the notes in *The Ivory Tower* for his first intuition of Haughty's character. 'Yes, there glimmers, there glimmers, something really more interesting, I think, than the mere nefarious act, something like a profoundly nefarious attitude, or even genius. I see, I really think I see, the real fine truth of the matter in *that*.' We may compare these quotations with the account of his inspiration which he scribbled one night on a sheet of paper, which is published in the *Letters*, and also quoted, more effectively than I can use it, in Herbert Read's *Form in Modern Poetry*.

'Momentary side-winds—things of no real authority—break in every now and then to put their inferior little questions to me, but I come back, I come back, as I say, I, all throbbingly and yearningly and passionately, oh, *mon bon*, come back to this way that is clearly the only

one in which I can do anything now, and that will open out to me more and more, and that has overwhelming reasons pleading all beautifully in its breast. What really happens is that the closer I get to the problem of the application of it in any particular case, the more I get *into* that application, so that the more doubts and torments fall away from me, the more I know where I am, the more everything spreads and shines and draws me on and I'm justified in my logic and my passion. *Causons, causons, mon bon*—oh, celestial, soothing, sanctifying process, with all the high sane forces of the sacred time fighting, through it, on my side! Let me fumble it gently and patiently out—with fever and fidget laid to rest—as in the old enchanted months! It only looms, it only shines and shimmers, *too* beautiful and *too* interesting, it only hangs there too rich and too full and with too much to give and to pay, it only presents itself too admirably and too vividly, too straight and square and vivid, as a little organic and effective Action.

Henry James's artistic method is thus not at all the method of the novelist who arranges his observations until they form a pattern, or a unity illustrating some philosophy. There is an interesting passage in the preface to *The Portrait of a Lady* which helps to show what his method of approach is.

"There is, I think, no more nutritive or suggestive truth in this connexion than that of the perfect dependence of the "moral" sense of a work of art on the amount of felt life concerned in producing it. The question comes back thus, obviously, to the kind and degree of the artist's prime sensibility, which is the soil out of which his subject springs. The quality and capacity of that soil, its capacity to "grow" with due freshness and straightness any vision of life, represents, strongly or weakly, the

projected morality . Here we get exactly the high price of the novel as a literary form—its power not only, while preserving that form with closeness, to range through all the differences of the individual relation to its general subject-matter, all the varieties of outlook on life, of disposition to reflect and project, created by conditions that are never the same from man to man (or, as far as that goes, from woman to woman), but positively to appear more true to its character in proportion as it strains, or tends to burst, with a latent extravagance, its mould.’<sup>1</sup>

This is the best defence of his characterization, which has been attacked often on the ground that his people are special cases, too clever to be human. His characters are not meant to be real in the sense that they are copies of the people whom, in life, they represent. They are only taken from life in the same way as the little allusion which was the germ of *The Spoils of Poynton* was taken from life. They are not portraits, but symbols of the types which they represent, in the same way as the characters in Shakespeare are not people whom one would meet in everyday life, but are yet symbols representing in their most significant form people who are real.

What he, better than any other novelist realized, is that Art, which is merely a reflexion of life, is either not Art but *rapportage*, or else Death Art. Constructive and living Art is always struggling against a stream of mere phenomena in order to create life.

When one is considering the historic position of a writer like James, it is important to remember that, although he is a novelist, he is also fulfilling other functions that were not fulfilled by the poets and dramatists

<sup>1</sup> I have used here the same quotations as are chosen by R. P. Blackmur in his Essay on ‘The Critical Prefaces’ published in *Hound and Horn*, Henry James Number. I am greatly indebted to this Essay

of his time. In the same way as, when veins are removed from the body, the blood will find other passages through which to flow back to the heart, so, when the drama, and, particularly, the poetic drama is dead, it becomes the function of other writing to replace it. The best evidence of the inadequacy of what James would call 'the amount of felt life' in modern poetry, is the existence of that attempted substitute for narrative and dramatic poetry, the poetic novel. And James in his novels was to a considerable degree always describing the effects of poetry and of poetic drama. It is part of his greatness, though, that he does not fall into the trap of writing poetic prose. In his own unique, passionately inventive medium he simply describes the feelings of people which in a less creatively repressed age than that of his contemporaries, or an age of less debased moral values, would have become poetry.

More apparent is his substitution of drama. Having himself failed to write plays for the stage, and being profoundly aware of the need for an existing dramatic tradition, he lifted scenes off the stage and presented them in his books. In the same way as he wrote described poetry, he wrote described drama. Not only is the dialogue in his later books built up into the scene, but the meditative and descriptive passages, all related through the minds of different characters, have the force of the soliloquy in the Elizabethan play. In one of his letters he explains the dramatic method of *The Awakening Age*. '—A form all dramatic and scenic—of presented episodes, architecturally combined and each making a piece of the building, with no going behind, no *telling about* the figures save by their own appearance and action and with explanations reduced to the explanation of everything by all the other things in the picture.'

We now see in array the inventions and technical

devices of his art, all uniting to compose that symmetry in his work which he calls 'the organ of life' Life at its most explicit, acted by people whose every gesture is part of an argument sustained by high intelligence. A life in which the palette of the sensations is as deliberately restrained as are the colours of his contemporary, Whistler. No one ever seems to sweat in a James novel, or suddenly loses his temper, or gets blind drunk, or gets randy. The emphasis is always on horizontal emotions which flow and grow and are part of the pulse of life, not breaking across it. Yet one is always aware of a great intellectual passion, weighing more heavily on the mind, as one follows the endless variations of the growing love or pain or understanding.

Part of the atmosphere of restraint is provided by the simplicity of his subjects. He is a symbolist in the sense that when he is best he takes an extremely simple subject, so simple that it can either be regarded as a *thing* which one can hold or look at from every angle, or else yet simpler, so that it can be comprehended in the title of the book or story. *The Ivory Tower*, *The Golden Bowl*, *The Spoils of Poynton*. He then does explore his object to the fullest extent, with the intensity of a crystal-gazer.

If one takes a typical section of his prose—a story such as *The Aspern Papers*, or a 'book' from *The Wings of the Dove* or *The Golden Bowl*, one is aware of three main concurrent strands of what one might call the 'morality,' as distinct from the typical Jamesian devices. The first of these is the pattern of social life, the world of appearances, of money, of habitations and dress, all elaborately 'placed,' which is the surface texture of the writing, above this, constantly thrown up from it, is the fantastic psychological imagery of the desires and frustrated wishes, which is as present to his characters as is the phenomenal world

James's intuitive genius lies in his unerring use of such imagery, his people live not only in the 'real' world, but also in a world of their own daydreams and their own psychological frustration. A part of their conversation is the things they say to themselves, the things that they would like to say to one another, and the things that somehow by a kind of unspoken intuitive language they do convey to each other. James never forgets this involuntary life of impulse, desire, and instinctive illumination. His characters, worldly as they may superficially seem, are constantly subject to visions, to moments of revelation, to inspired action. This is what gives their life a moral significance which illumines all their thought, and which makes them capable of good and evil, in spite of their preoccupation with the æsthetic side of behaviour.

Underneath the other two strands there runs the strand of plot, of destiny. The thread which is beyond their control, and which leads in *The Wings of the Dove* to the death of Milly and to the frustration of Kate's and Densher's happiness.

Destiny is in James's books closely linked to the decadence of the people he is describing, and to their social conditions. The decadence makes them, to a great extent, victims of their environment and of their tradition, they are limited in their range of action, they are practically incapable, for example, of living an admirable life without a great deal of money.

Money is in these novels the golden key that enables people to live in a world where they are free to plot their lives beautifully, and to act significantly. James has been severely criticized for this materialist view. There is a confusion in this criticism, because one has only to read his letters to realize that the whole business of money and money-making disgusted him. It simply struck him as

a part of the moral incongruity and decadence of the world he was studying, that without this stained and dishonoured money, a life that was civilized and intelligent was practically impossible. This point of view has been the inspiration of many Socialists, and it was commonly held by liberal-minded and cultured people before the war. For example, one finds it running through E. M. Forster's novel, *Howard's End*. James's insistence on means was his reaction from business, he insisted that his characters must be free from the appalling dullness of 'making' money. In order to free them, they must either be paupers or else have the money already made for them. He was a scientific social observer, in the sense that the centre of his interest was fixed on one small class of people, the economic conditions of whose lives were parasitic, so that they were free to lead the kind of life which seemed to him the peak of interest in our civilization. They were the highest product of history, and in them one could see the depths to which the tradition had sunk. In confining his attention to this small class he was like a specialist who studies the behaviour of a certain metal at a certain temperature.

Because money has a symbolic value in his work, it has been assumed that a passion for money was a part of James's social snobbery. No doubt he liked the best that Europe could give. He remarked to Desmond MacCarthy that he could 'stand a good deal of gold'. However, the fascination of gold in his books is that it is at once the symbol of release from the more servile processes of the world in which we live, and also supremely the symbol of the damned.

It is the symbol of the damned firstly because nothing in our civilization (as it now is) can ever atone for the wickedness of acquiring it, and secondly, because it



damns the people who happen to possess it without having acquired it, since it has been got for them.

The horror of acquiring it is doubly dealt with in *The Wings of the Dove*. Densher and Kate damn themselves in getting it, and Milly is destroyed by having it. His last book, *The Ivory Tower*, shows signs that it might have been full of a Timonesque rage against money. It opens with a study of the death of two terrible old cronies: one a swindler of great personal charm and human understanding, the other an honest business man whose mind has become a machine for calculation, and who dies with disgust because he has reason to believe that the swindler may recover. The feeling that 'every dollar is earned' hangs over the two heirs, a young man and a young woman. The young woman hates every dollar she has; the young man, in an endeavour to make the best of a heritage, the use of which he does not in the least understand, puts all his affairs in the charge of a friend. The friend, Haughton, swindles him, and Gray watches the extent of his dishonesty grow and grow, with a feeling partly of sympathy, partly of amused disgust. In addition to this, in an ornament a drawer of the ivory tower, there is concealed a letter from the dead financier explaining in detail to Gray the extent of his uncle's (from whom he has inherited his fortune) dishonesty. In the notes for James's private use, which are published at the end of the unfinished book, there is a contemptuous reference to the 'overdone idealism' of 'Rockefellers and their like'. One could not go much further than James has done in this posthumously published work to show disgust at the whole money machine.

There are even occasions on which James's characters consider renouncing their chances of gaining money. Densher proposes to Kate in *The Wings of the Dove* that

they should marry on what they have—which is nothing. But a respectable marriage on nothing, is a prospect which she cannot face, with the example of her smart, plausible, penniless scamp of a father, and her drudge of a sister before her. James explains, though, in the notes to *The Story Teller* that Gray was a character he had always longed to create, someone who refused utterly to be on the make. In *The Spoils of Poynton*, that violent Chekhovian comedy, it is the things themselves, the Spoils, which are evil, which destroy the happiness of all the people who are interested in them. And every possible variation of interest is represented. The collector's interest of Mrs. Gereth, the pure aesthetic almost disinterested sympathy and appreciation of Fleda, the righteous appropriation of Owen, and the commercial grabbing of his fiancée and her family. There is no story to compare with this for the sense of moral blame which emanates from the precious objects and attaches to one person after another in the story. At the end of the story, when the house with all its treasures is seen in flames, one becomes aware of what was always wrong, it was the Spoils themselves.

The symbol of corruption is not the wealth, but the misapplication of wealth in our civilization, just as in other civilizations wealth is the symbol of the finest creativeness, the greatest artistic achievement. The corruption of our time is partly also that wealth can only be obtained by the vulgarest, that is to say the most deathly, means, the tradition of a great aristocracy, of a great cultural past is, as it were, basely misapplied. Money is, in James's books, a symbol for the corruption of the past in the life of the present, it is a corrupted tradition. If one accepts this convention, one sees that the action of a person in his novels who refused to make or acquire money (Gray already has it) would be irrelevant, it would

correspond to the action of someone who cuts himself off from tradition, who emigrates

Civilization, tradition, high intelligence, tact, understanding, the ability to love and to suffer, are the chief moral values which one finds in James's work. There is a tendency of his characters to regard the intelligent as the beautiful and the beautiful in behaviour as the good. The passive moral quality of these almost dead people is their ability to feel and to atone for evil, by suffering. Individualism becomes a value which applies to his whole view of life, both for himself and for his creations. At the end of his life he wrote in a letter 'I believe only in absolutely independent, individual and lonely virtue, and in the serenely unsociable practice of the same, the observation of a lifetime having convinced me that no fruit ripens but under that temporarily graceless rigour, and that the associational process for bringing it on is but a bright and hollow artifice'

His belief in sensibility, of course, followed from his belief in the supreme value of the experience of individuals. 'If there be a wisdom in not feeling—to the last throb—the great things that happen to us, it is a wisdom I shall never either know or esteem'

But, in being individual, it was not an isolated sensibility. It was a sensibility which made one acutely part of the world and time in which one was living. 'The roaring, rushing world seems to me myself—with its brutal and vulgar racket—all the while a less and less enticing place for living in'

He had no political opinions. Only an intense awareness of existing opinion. He wrote to his nephew, in 1899. 'Thank God, I've no opinions—not even on the Dreyfus case. I'm more and more aware of things as a mere mad panorama, phantasmagoria and dime museum'

When he said he had no opinions, he no doubt meant that he had none so long as no opponent's opinion was forced on him. That is to say, his dislike of the Germans, of impropriety, of vulgarity, were all negative, latent feelings. He did not preach them, and he only became aware of them at all strongly when he met their opposites in the news.

He was extremely interested in murder trials, and in social scandals, such as divorce. He used to collect the reports, cutting them out of the newspapers.

He was a man whose life was withdrawn far into himself, although he was capable of passionate disquisitions on his art. In his behaviour he was benevolent, genial, mannered, but in spite of his sociability, everything about him convinces one of his ultimate loneliness. He had a strong regard for the social conventions, and as he grew older was intolerant of such small freedoms as that his guests should not wear dress clothes in the evening. He was a good talker, but his conversation was as involved as his literary style. An uncle of mine who knew him has told me that when James grew his beard, the effect on his sensibility was such, that instead of it leading to people not recognizing him, as one would have expected, it led to a failure on his part to recognize his friends. He talked slowly, elaborately, and there were long pauses when he was searching for the right word. It was terrible if some helpful interfering person offered a word to him.

In conversation he liked, of course, mostly to discuss psychological subjects. Human relationships were an endless topic. Marriage fascinated him, it excited in him feelings of curiosity, anxiety and even hatred.

The same uncle once, in the middle of Regent Street, crossing amongst the traffic, met James. Whilst they were standing there he learnt that my uncle had just

returned from India This struck him greatly, since he himself had just returned from what was to prove his last visit to America He started to elaborate on the theme of the impression on an Englishman just returned from India, made by an American living for many years in England, who had just returned to England from a visit to his native land It was impossible for many minutes to extricate him from the traffic

Sometimes, in a friendly spirit, people would bait him Once someone, to do so, asked him what must have been the feelings of Mr Lewes, the husband of George Eliot, on hearing that his wife had died James considered it intensely, and answered slowly 'Agony. . Dismay Amazement Fear ' Then suddenly his face lighted He threw up his hands and almost shouted 'Relief'

When one reads *A Small Boy and Others* and *Notes of a Son and Brother*, one realizes the passionate bond between him and his brother William, and his tenderness for his cousin Mary Temple, whom he is thought to have loved, and who died when she was young Later in life, what predominates in his letters is interest in the young, particularly in certain writers who were then young men, Hugh Walpole, Compton Mackenzie, H G Wells, and Rupert Brooke

One must remember that to people who did not know him well, or who perhaps met him without feeling predisposed to like him, he must sometimes have seemed long-winded, stiff, snobbish, and terribly respectable Such at all events was the opinion of one disinterested and extremely sensitive witness who described him to me as, when he was certainly an old man, 'a frozen-up old monster' With his stiff collar, his morning suit, his top hat, his fawn waistcoat, his suspicion of people who were

not impressed by, and who did not kow-tow to, these things, his polite absurd conversational mannerisms, his 'my dear lady's,' 'my dear young man's,' one must admit that there is something which fits in this description. Yet at the time I speak of, to judge from *The Ivory Tower*, *The Sense of the Past* and some of his letters, he must in his thoughts have been immersed in a sense of beauty amounting to a flood of poetry.

And what finally counts are the qualities which one finds in his books that most obviously spring from the depths of his own self: his morality, his pity, his humanity, his feminine genius and feminine courage, his gift of profound understanding. These qualities are not learnt from observation, but derived from remoteness, from journeys far into himself. Yet he has the sane saving power of observation. The book on America, *The American Scene* (written in 1907), which is still one of the best books on modern America, shows how little he ever lost this.

If one realizes these two aspects—the observation, brilliant and external, the emotion, the mature fruit of the man's own pity and moral feeling—one will realize also how profound is his indictment of our civilization in those three last great novels, *The Wings of the Dove*, *The Golden Bowl*, and *The Ambassadors*.

## THE UNCONSCIOUS

'THE PLAY OF ONE'S MIND,' reflected Martin Densher, in the course of one of his terrible interviews with Kate Croy's aunt, Mrs Lowder, 'gave one away, at the last, dreadfully in action, in the need for action, where simplicity was all      What he must use his fatal intelligence for was to resist '

The fatal intelligence which is the enemy to action is cast over the three great novels, *The Wings of the Dove*, *The Ambassadors*, and *The Golden Bowl*. The result of it is that the heroes and heroines of these novels are all passive, they do not act at all, their morality is to suffer generously. It also follows that what they have to suffer from is being more intelligent than the other characters. Also, there are no villains. It is important to emphasize this, because in these really savage novels the behaviour of some of the characters is exposed in its most brutal form. But the wickedness of the characters lies primarily in their situation. Once the situation is provided the actors cannot behave otherwise. Their only compensation is that by the use of their intelligence, by their ability to understand, to love, and to suffer, they may to some extent atone for the evil which is simply the evil of their modern world. It is these considerations that make his later books parables of modern Western civilization.

The plot of each book is based on the development of a very simple situation. Directly one has fully grasped the

situation, the revelation of which forms the plot, one knows what will happen, and part of the interest is to see how each character gradually learns what the whole situation is. It is, then, a question of what his attitude will be to a situation developing as logically as a neurotic illness, such as paranoia, or as the causes of the European War were developing, when James wrote this novel.

The situation in *The Wings of the Dove* is crystallized by the meeting of Milly, the young, attractive, ill and orphaned millionairess, with Martin Densher and Kate Croy. By chance she meets them separately, Martin in New York, before she comes to Europe, and Kate in London as soon as she arrives there. It thus happens that the coincidence of their having already met before she knew either of them does not force itself on her until very late in her adventures, especially as they are occupied in trying to conceal from her that they are lovers.

In the first part of the book—before we meet Milly at all—there is a whole 'book' to impress on us all the circumstances of Kate's and Martin's love-making. How they have no money to marry on. How Kate is only saved by the protection of her aunt, Mrs. Lowder, from being at the mercy of her scandalous but plausible father who has committed some unmentionable fraud, and her low, gossiping sister. The aunt, who rescues her, wishes her to marry a peer, and will not accept Martin, a vague, impecunious, interesting, charming journalist of the kind who is a social correspondent, and who has no prospects.

Milly, on the other hand, is a character of the type whom Lawrence calls in *Aaron's Rod* a 'murderee'. People who see her and who are disinterested, are touched by the sense of her doom which she wears. 'She had the most extraordinary sense of interesting her guest, in spite of herself, more than she wanted, it was as if her doom



so floated her on that she couldn't stop—by very much the same trick it had played her with the doctor'

Kate and Martin are the murderers appointed by nature and the economic system to destroy Milly. As merciless as vultures, and terrible in their health and their strong physical passion, they swoop down on her. That is what the unconscious ordains that they should do. The interest of the book lies in the play of the intelligence on this process.

Milly has one way out. When she is ill, she goes to a doctor, who, by what should have been a stroke of the greatest fortune, happens to be a psychologist of genius as great as James himself. He tells her that she has the power to get well, in order to do so she must choose to live. In her case, living means that she must have a lover.

It so happens that the person whom Milly has been in love with, ever since she met him in America, is Martin Densher. With great courage and simplicity, after she has seen the doctor, she sets out to marry Martin. Kate now realizes what is to be Milly's doom. It is easy for her to arrange with Martin to conceal their engagement from Milly, because it is in any case a secret, as it is against the wishes of Mrs. Lowder, the aunt, who is a confidential friend of the lady companion whom Milly brings with her from America. But she goes further than mere concealment, she lets Milly understand that she dislikes Martin, and that she resents or only tolerates his attentions, so that Milly not only feels herself more than ever free, but also anxious to console Martin. Kate then gets Martin himself involved, by persuading him to 'make up' to Milly, on the pretext that it is useful for him to do so, since it enables them to have a meeting-place in Milly's rooms. It is difficult for them to meet at Mrs. Lowder's. One of the worst difficulties of

their impoverished courting is that they have nowhere to go

The scene shifts to Venice, where Milly takes a palace. She is now very much in love with Martin, and her health is so bad, that she is expected to die. Kate now proposes to Martin that he should actually marry Milly, in the expectation of her dying, and thus gain the money for them both. He is almost ill with waiting for Kate, who, all this time, in order to keep the situation keyed up to the highest pitch, will not sleep with him. However, she promises to sleep with him if he will agree to her plan, and he agrees.

He lingers on in Venice, visiting Milly every day, and becoming more and more impressed by her vivid, sensitive personality. But he does not propose. One day an admirer of Milly and also of Kate—Lord Mark—arrives, and tells Milly that Kate and Martin are engaged. Milly does not believe it. He returns to England, makes quite certain, goes again to Venice, and this time he convinces Milly. She turns her face to the wall.

But Milly, after she is dead, still has her beautiful gesture. She leaves her money, or a great deal of it, to Martin, and he and Kate know that it is left for them both. They have got what they wanted. But in the course of doing so they have been revealed to themselves and to each other in a light that shows too clearly their real value, and that destroys love. Martin, in particular, knows that the really valuable human being is dead, and Kate knows that he has this knowledge. Yet they themselves are moral in the sense that they are not cowards. They are able to face their situation and to recognize the judgment on what has happened. The book ends on this note when Kate says: 'We shall never be the same as we were!'

James's morality is shown here as clearly as possible, in Milly's attitude. Her behaviour is made moral by the

extent of her compassionate understanding. What she understands is not merely that her friends have cheated her, but that their *action* is comparatively irrelevant. At the end of the book it becomes clear that in reality Densher loves Milly and not Kate, in spite of his extraordinary calculation. Moreover, in spite of their joint intrigue Kate and Densher have never the least desire to hurt Milly. They genuinely believe that she is doomed to die, and they both want her, until she dies, to be as happy as possible, or, as Milly sees it, they want, like everyone else around her, to 'let her down as gently as possible'. It is true that they do not want to give her the love from lack of which she is dying, but the strange result of their terrible behaviour is that they do give even this to her. It is the love which Milly recognizes.

The drama, with its considerable element of horror, lies in their being conscious of their designs. The book moves, as it were, on two conflicting planes. The plane of conscious, social, polite, exquisite appearances, and the plane of unconscious desires. The peculiarity of these people is that they have to a quite abnormal degree a realization of their unconscious motives. In real, everyday life, most people are subject to fantasies of the acquisitive sort that ruled the lives of Martin and Kate. Many people act on these fantasies in a quite unscrupulous way, without in the least knowing that they are doing so. For example, few people are able to thwart the urges of a really strong ambition. The only peculiarity of Martin and Kate, is the degree to which they allow their designs to become conscious. And by making them conscious, James was, of course, making them moral agents. He was distinguishing them from a society where people act like Kate and Densher, a society of vultures, wolves, tigers and hogs, but who are living in

such a befogged state of moral existence that they are not in the least conscious of what they are doing

The next point one notices, is that James, although he is so passionate an individualist, does not damn Kate and Martin. What he condemns, by implication, is society. He regards them as simply the exceptionally conscious members of a society which is built up, on, and by, people who behave as they do, and which is so morally blind that the builders, the empire-builders, the self-made men, etc., do not know that they are morally dead. This is again what Milly sees in Densher and Kate, when she does not judge them by their acts. She judges their acts as the result of their environment, of their thwarted sexual happiness, their exceptional beauty and normality. What she judges them by, is the strange inconsistency of their intention, the fact that they both let her down so gently, that Densher does love her, that her generosity will seem to them appalling.

So Kate and Densher are at one stage of moral consciousness. Like Baudelaire, they are able to be damned. When Densher half admiringly asks Kate how she can behave so brutally—'What I don't make out is how, caring for me, you can like it,' she replies with a touch of satanic pride, 'I don't like it, but I'm a person, thank goodness, who can do what I don't like.' One can see how that distinguishes her from the world of good-fellowship and conferences. She is a human being in the sense that she has broken away from her sordid home, and is free at least to behave like an inspired devil.

Since James condemns society and yet is no revolutionary, it follows that for him the individualist is the only person who is free to do good or evil. For that reason his virtuous characters, Milly, Strether, and Maggie Verver, are essentially all isolated and cut off

from their surroundings. They lead a life which is morally conscious, but which is cut off from the main stream of contemporary life, and which borders always very close to death, because they do, in fact, so many of them, die. Yet they die to avoid the living death of people who are alive, but dead to all consciousness of moral values. The evil of society is that it is dead to those values. In these characters there is always a conflict, because they are aware that they are shut off from life. Milly is acutely aware that she ought to have a lover. Strether that he is now too old to live, Maggie that her marriage with the prince has failed. All of them put it to themselves that they have refused something called life.

The structure of the book is very complicated, because not only does the subject cover a great deal of the past—of what has happened in Kate's family before the action begins—but also the action is centred in different characters. We move to and fro, sometimes seeing through the mind of Kate, sometimes of Milly, sometimes of Martin. In addition to this, we are living in two completely different worlds, the language of the one being everyday appearances, the language of the other being sometimes the images of poetry, sometimes dream symbolism. James does not seem quite clear in this novel as to which world his characters belong, or rather, which characters belong to which world. For example, in *The Ambassadors*, it is clear that Strether lives in a world quite of his own, which does not touch even on the world of Chad which Strether himself imagines to be the world that he is experiencing, that is to say, what he experiences is what he imagines Chad's world to be, so that he is living in a world created by his own imagination and fed by his understanding. This world is, in reality, quite different from Chad's world, which is the world of a 'man of the world,'

and it is different again from the America of Chad's relatives. In *The Golden Bowl* it is clear that Maggie and her father speak a language which is quite different from the language of their *spousi*. But in *The Wings of the Dove* the distinction is not made quite clear. Although Milly is isolated in her circumstances, she is not sufficiently isolated in her imagination. Kate, Densher and Lord Mark all understand her and speak her language only too well. She is only different from them in that, owing to her situation, she understands more about all of them than they do about her, not, as it should be, that her understanding is of a different quality.

The dream imagery which James uses so freely in his later novels is all in evidence here. His use of it is to relate someone's fantastic picture of his surroundings, without the least transition, exactly as if the fantasy were a part of reality. The boundary between what is real and what is fantastic, becomes more and more indistinct, because, in the artificial lives of these *rentiers*, it becomes less and less important, until in *The Golden Bowl* a climax is reached where the life of fantasy is more important than the life of 'reality'.

An image which describes exactly her psychological condition is introduced suddenly into a meditation of Milly's after she has visited the doctor. 'She looked about her again, on her feet, at her scattered melancholy companions—some of them so melancholy as to be down on their stomachs in the grass, turned away, ignoring, burrowing'. It is such plunges into the world of dreams which are so revealing in James. In their thoughts his characters are always 'giving the show away', the show that is so gilded and magnificent, its magnificence being the wealth of a civilization and the tradition of Europe, and the 'give away' being so complete. For what his

characters stoop down and draw up from the unconscious, is a despair far more overwhelming than their small private sorrows the despair of Europe

*The Ambassadors* is, in a popular sense, James's masterpiece. It is not as great a book as *The Golden Bowl*, yet it has the merit of being more readable. The *thing* in this book, the object which we hold on to and see from every angle is Paris. The mission on which Strether, the fifty-five-year-old New England editor of a green-covered magazine which keeps up the tone of Woollett, and which is amply paid for by Mrs Newsome, is sent to Paris, is to save Chad Newsome, her son, from an immoral life which he has notoriously been leading with some unknowable woman, and to bring him back to America to help run his late father's business. The business is the manufacture of some unmentionable article of domestic use. If Strether is successful in procuring Chad, his reward will be marriage with the prosperous Mrs Newsome.

But from the moment of Strether's first walk in Paris, the importance of his mission seems to fade to nothing. 'In the Luxembourg Gardens he pulled up, here at last he found his nook, and here, on a penny chair from which terraces, alleys, vistas, fountains, little trees in green tubs, little women in white caps and shrill little girls at play all suddenly "composed" together, he passed an hour in which the cup of his emotions seemed truly to overflow. But a week had elapsed since he quitted the ship, and there were more things in his mind than so few days could account for. More than once during the time he had regarded himself as admonished, but the admonition this morning was formidably sharp. It took as it hadn't done yet the form of a question—the question of what he was doing with such an extraordinary sense of

escape ' What is happening to him is that the hope of his youth of what life might *mean* is suddenly revived 'Buried for long years in dark corners, at any rate, these few germs had sprouted again under forty-eight hours of Paris '

When he meets Chad, he finds that Chad does not in the least resemble the pushing little urchin he had seemed in America In fact, he is changed beyond recognition He has an air now of being a man of the world, an air of tact, of distinction, of happiness and gravity 'The change in him was perhaps more than anything else, for the eye, a matter of the marked streaks of grey, extraordinary at his age, in his thick black hair, as well as that this new feature was curiously becoming to him, did something for him, as characterization, also even—of all things in the world—as refinement, that had been a good deal wanted '

Another germ of his life, hidden in an even darker corner, now sprouts, because Strether himself has had a son who died at an early age, a few years after the death of his own wife Nevertheless, he conveys, in the frankest way, his message from 'the family' to Chad, and then for ever leaves it, and waits on in Paris

What he now realizes is that Chad has the appearance of having had something prodigious done for him, in the way of his being quite transformed by some human care

Then he meets the woman, Madame de Vionnet, and again he is moved and touched. From now on he accepts the whole thing, he accepts Chad's indolence, and the uncreative gossip lives of his arty friends, and the fact that M de Vionnet is living, and finally the absolute proof that Madame de Vionnet is Chad's mistress, a fact which completely blows up what is left of Woollett in him

Strether is one of James's many characters who has



missed life. He has never lived, he has been too passive ever to put up any fight for life, and now when he realizes what he has missed, it is too late. The whole book is his vision of what he has lost, and out of his vision he passionately takes the side of those whom he imagines to be, as he sees it, living. To quote from James's Preface: 'The whole case, in fine, is in Lambert Strether's irrepressible outbreak to little Bilham on the Sunday afternoon in Gloriani's garden, the candour with which he yields, for his young friend's enlightenment, to the charming admonition of that crisis. The idea of the tale resides indeed in the very fact that an hour of such unprecedented ease should have been felt by him *as* a crisis, and he is at pains to express it for us as neatly as we could desire. The remarks to which he thus gives utterance contain the essence of *The Ambassadors*, his fingers close, before he has done, round the stem of the full-blown flower, which, after that fashion, he continues officiously to present to us. 'Live all you can, it's a mistake not to. It doesn't so much matter what you do in particular so long as you have your life. If you haven't had that what *have* you had? I'm too old—too old, at any rate, for what I see. What one loses one loses, make no mistake about that. Still, we have the illusion of freedom, therefore don't, like me to-day, be without the memory of that illusion. I was either, at the right time, too stupid or too intelligent to have it, and now I'm a case of reaction against the mistake. Do what you like as long as you don't make it. For it *was* a mistake. Live, live!'

This was the allusion that was the germ of *The Ambassadors*, the speech on the part of someone, in just such a garden as is described in the book, which was related to James by a friend, as being so remarkable.

Strether is mistaken in his view of the life that the

others are leading. He becomes passionately attached to an idea of their life which is very slightly an anachronism, he is in love with a conception of history which he has learnt from the parks and squares of Paris, and not from the lives of the people round him, although he has embodied an ideal in Chad. Madame de Vionnet easily makes an ally of him, and he now joins with her in trying to *prevent* Chad from crossing the Atlantic.

Whereas Mrs Newsome, who now sends her daughter and son-in-law and his sister,—the Pococks,—to Europe, to replace Strether, has turned on him, Chad treats him more and more with an amused tolerance. There is more of Woollett in Chad—and, one suspects, in Paris—than Strether had imagined. The scene in which Chad shows his interest in 'the business' has in it an element of obscene horror. Strether has been urging on him that if he forsakes Madame de Vionnet he would be "not only, as I say, a brute, you'd be," his companion went on in the same way, "a criminal of the deepest dye." Chad protests in the vein of, "Of course, I really never forget, night or day, what I owe her. I owe her everything. I give you my word of honour," he frankly rang out, "that I'm not a bit tired of her." Strether at this only gave him a stare.

he spoke of being "tired" of her almost as he might have spoken of being tired of roast mutton for dinner.

Chad goes on protesting too much in a light, rather indifferent, chaffing manner, for some time. 'But there was just one thing for which, before they broke off, Chad seemed disposed slightly to bargain. His companion needn't, as he said, tell him, but he might himself mention that he had been getting some news of the art of advertisement. Advertising scientifically worked presented itself as the great new force. 'It really does the thing, you know.'

'They were face to face under the street-lamp as they had been the first night, and Strether, no doubt, looked blank "Affects, you mean, the sale of the object advertised?"

' "Yes—but affects it extraordinarily, really beyond what one supposed . In the hands, naturally, of a master The right man must take hold With the right man to work it *c'est un monde* "

'Strether had watched him quite as if, there on the pavement, he had begun to dance a fancy step '

With Strether's impression of 'an irrelevant hornpipe or jig' the book seems to wake up with a start from his wonderful dream Their various dooms await them Chad will go back to Woollett and manage the business and marry the young American girl, Mamie Pocock, who has been brought over with her relatives as a bait to tempt him Strether is disgraced He might seem at this stage to become a completely quixotic, self-deceptive figure, since he had based his whole belief in life on Chad But he is not really deceived What he has learnt—and what we have learnt—is that it is Strether himself, and not Chad, who has, during this amazing six months, lived For Strether has realized a fact that Chad experienced and then rejected That the life of Woollett and of advertising is not life at all, but death That in the gardens and squares of certain European cities the ghosts of a real life, not governed by those values, still lurk And that it is possible for the young if they rebel against what Woollett represents, and do not allow themselves grossly to be bought back, to live

In this book one notices markedly James's absolute refusal to go forward into the world of machinery and business It is quite wonderful the way the incursion of these things breaks the book off, as abruptly as his

life work was broken off by the terrible crushing reality of the War. When the War broke out he gave up writing *The Ivory Tower*, and sought relief in returning to the pure fantasy of *The Sense of the Past*.

Yet there is a classic of modern literature which is comparable to *The Ambassadors*, supposing James had dealt with the side of modern life, of the great city, of Paris even, which he so definitely rejects. That book is James Joyce's *Ulysses*.

There is a remarkable similarity in the setting of the two books. The object in *Ulysses* which compares with the use of Paris in *The Ambassadors* is Dublin, it is the presence, with all its movement and traffic and all its ghosts, of a great town. The difference is that Joyce has described in Dublin everything that James left out of Paris. the whores, the dirt, the military, the low life. An involved compact little Jew, whose brain crawls with undeveloped romantic and scientific ideas, like larvæ of insects, the products of a half-educated age, wanders through Dublin, just as Strether walked, or was driven rather more stylishly, through Paris. Like Strether, Bloom has lost an only son at a very early age, and he transfers his hope and affection on a young man, Stephen Daedalus.

The method of Joyce's book is also an extension of the Jamesian method. James invented the technique of following always the thoughts of his characters, of seeing each character through the other characters, and of revealing the stream of monologue in which each character addresses to himself his hidden thoughts. This is also the method of *Ulysses*, although here, as in other respects, Joyce has extended the principle right to its logical conclusion.

Comparing the books, one is at once aware of a certain

evasion in *The Ambassadors* James has avoided the shocking revelations of his method of exploring the minds of his characters, by exercising a strict censorship over their thoughts. But one may suspect that his style was leading him Joycewards, when one reflects how much broader is the outlook of *The Ambassadors* than that of the earlier books.

The danger of the method of the interior monologue (or whatever it has been branded) is that it may fall completely into chaos. For the unconscious is the chaos of unexpressed and uncontrolled desires and emotions, and the danger is that of simply reflecting the unexpressed. We shall see that there is an element of chaos even in the wonderfully organized variations of *The Golden Bowl*, and *Ulysses*, in spite of its incredible technical accomplishment, is also on the verge of it. In *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Ambassadors*, it is avoided, partly because the action is never far removed from the conscious plane. In the first section of *Ulysses* the balance of conscious and unconscious is achieved, but I think it is true to say that the last three-quarters of the book are all in the *Walpurgisnacht* mood, although Joyce has rather ingeniously concealed this by making the dramatic section so obviously resemble the corresponding scene in Goethe's *Faust* that one does not notice the persistence of this similarity in all the later settings. However, as an artistic whole, *Ulysses* is obviously less complete than *The Golden Bowl*, although it contains an even greater artistry. The opening is too realistic, and all Joyce's technical devices do not succeed in concealing the fundamental monotony of style, thought, content, action, and characterization. The characters seem hardly worked into the book at all. Although Marion Tweedy Bloom and Leopold are man and wife, the parts allotted to them divide the

book into great hunks which fall apart in the memory. Bloom is magnificent, and most magnificent of all is Marion Tweedy's monologue which forms the last section of the book. But Stephen is so disastrous a failure that he is only recognizable at all by being made inseparable from his ashplant<sup>1</sup>. The large conception of the book creates a sense of size beside which James's books seem small, but unfortunately Joyce's own characters are drowned in their environment.

In *The Ambassadors*, James avoids the danger of the monologue falling over into chaos by making Strether's thought entirely spiritual. Strether's mind is almost incapable of apprehending isolated facts. He lives in a perfect Spinozan universe of life, each single part of which is a little mirror that reflects the whole. The café with its tables set out on the pavement is Paris, and Paris is life. Woollett is death. Chad, too, is only acceptable because he is life, and, because he is life, Strether accepts even the fact that he is living with Madame de Vionnet, in fact, he gets a kick out of it. Anything which he cannot accept, destroys the unity which he sees reflected in all his little mirrors. In this way the book, like an immense silver sphere, or a hanging candelabrum of prismatic crystals, proceeds beautifully and smoothly to be built up to its climax, when Chad dances his obscene little jig and smashes everything, except Strether's own inner world, to smithereens. The difficulty is that the book, in spite of its seriousness, has an air of unreality. We sympathize with Strether, but it is possible to regard him—as does one of the young critics in *Hound and Horn* James number—as being pathetic, which, of course, is to destroy the book's whole meaning. The truth is that Strether rejects Woollett in favour of Paris too completely. He

<sup>1</sup> See Wyndham Lewis's *Time and Western Man*

fails to see that there is also something of Woollett in modern Paris, that in order even to accept Paris he has got somehow to make a synthesis which includes a great deal of the original Woollett

In *Ulysses* verbal chaos (as apart from artistic chaos, of which there is plenty) is avoided, by a device which is the exact converse of that in *The Ambassadors*. The whole of the thought is symbolized by objects. The dream imagery used by James to some extent in *The Wings of the Dove* and to a large extent in *The Golden Bowl* (but not at all in *The Ambassadors*, in which the imagery is always poetic) is used throughout. But the dream is always absolutely without censorship, and Bloom's half-penitent reflexion that 'sleep reveals the worst side of one' might be taken as a comment on the whole book. To some extent the greater freedom of expression in Joyce, is to be accounted for, not so much by James's prudishness, as by the different subject-matter of his book. For James is describing people who are far more repressed than the Dubliners in *Ulysses*. It is natural that a James character should not think in terms of phalluses, but of ivory towers, beautiful lakes, pagodas and golden bowls. Nevertheless this does not account for a certain ambiguity in his own attitude, for one's feeling is that he identified himself with his repressed characters to an extent that sometimes belies his studiously conscious artistic method.

*Ulysses* is an extremely learned book, which contains a mass of connotation. Bloom is immensely informed in a half-baked sort of way, but, in being so, he is far more like his author, and the majority of modern authors, than one at first imagines. For Joyce also has Bloom's habit of endless fragmentary connotation, which one finds also in Baudelaire and in Eliot. Bloom's mind is, in fact, a parody of the modern literary or scientific mind. He has a

gift for scientific allusion, and erudition of a kind which delights in puns, private jokes, and the use of a language heightened by the mixture of four or five other languages.

So the knowingness of Bloom extends far beyond himself, and positively floods the book. Also Joyce's descriptions nearly always relate the object described to the immense heap of personalia, of private association which makes up his world, for example, the 'snot-green sea'. His book has a weakness, which is the opposite of the spirituality of *The Ambassadors*: the factual realism is so strong, that it is not balanced sufficiently by any emotional qualities large enough to reach beyond their association with particular objects which excite our disgust or pleasure.

Joyce's poems, his short stories, and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, show us where he fails most. In the poems there is an unexpected tendency to sentimentality and prettiness. In *A Portrait of the Artist* this sentimentality assumes the inverted form of a rather adolescent pleasure in the disgusting: physical desire and many physical processes are considered sinful and therefore disgusting, and because they are disgusting, therefore exciting and desirable.

This may explain why so many readers of *Ulysses* (even so admiring a critic as Professor Ernst Robert Curtius) have insisted that finally it leaves in the mouth a taste of dust and ashes, although the most persistent note of the book is one of geniality. It contains humour of a kind which has practically disappeared from literature, and which certainly one does not find in English since Swift. This humour is only consistent with the greatest possible underlying seriousness, and the difficulty is that the humour itself is not, in a sense, serious enough. That is to say, firstly, it does not extend widely enough to enclose



the whole theme. Each joke stands by itself, and the many jokes have the air of being a constantly repeated variation on one joke, not parts of one gigantic, inclusive joke. Secondly, when we come to Stephen and his ash-plant, in spite of the most strenuous and erudite efforts, the joke breaks down, Stephen is pedantic and ponderous, and it is impossible to take him as seriously as Bloom, and therefore impossible to be funny about him. Thirdly, the humour is strained, because, like the character of Stephen, the book itself seems often to be forced, almost to breaking-point. The author seems determined, at whatever cost, to write a masterpiece, which, however much it may be distorted and broken up, is yet completely in the tradition of *Madame Bovary* and all the classics. So that the book wears a thick surface polish, and one is made on every page to realize that, however disrupted the separate parts may seem, they do all in some intricate and secret way fit together and conform to a pattern, the key to which may be found in *The Odyssey*. The book is made complete in itself, with no loose ends, in fact, the finale is made as decisive and emphatic as possible. A great hunk of prose is written, which ends off the book like a massive stone monolith. This attempt at a forced perfection seems to me an error of taste, as gross as that of making Stephen a writer. It illustrates James's immense superiority as an artist, to reflect that his last books do not aim at a completion to compare with *Ulysses*. The end of *The Wings of the Dove*, although it kills Milly, only brings us back to another beginning. The book starts off with a description of the relationship of Kate and Martin, and it ends with a slight modification of that relationship which gives it a 'fresh start'. *The Golden Bowl* ends also with a new beginning; it describes the termination of Maggie's 'marriage' with

her father, and it opens out on to another unwritten volume which would describe the married life of Charlotte and Mr Verver in America. *The Ambassadors* breaks off at the point where a new and fascinating book might describe Strether's life alone, after he had been forsaken by Chad and Mrs Newsome. It is part of James's method to allow his books gently to flow into the life around us. It is interesting to reflect that his books always end at the point where the action of his characters becomes most credible, having explained how these exceptional cases do fit into the life which we all know, he leaves us with them, and them with us.

*Ulysses* fails then as *comédie humaine*. As tragedy, it is too studied, and the use of the corpse in the play scene brings with it a strong whiff of stage settings in grand opera.

Apart from the humour, the strongest emotion in *Ulysses* is an overpowering sense of sin. It is perhaps this which made T. S. Eliot remark in *After Strange Gods* that 'the most ethically orthodox of the more eminent writers of my time is Mr. Joyce,' and, again, that his work is 'penetrated with Christian feeling.' We are dealing here, of course, with a side of Christianity which has nothing to do with Christ. For there is no evidence that Christ had a fascinated sense of the wickedness of the body, and it is this physical obsession which permeates *Ulysses*. Sin and death are all that is left of the Church even. There is no belief in salvation, that has been thrown overboard by Stephen in *A Portrait of the Artist*, only a nightmare vision of a world smelling with the dregs of a hated Catholicism, endless sin and no salvation. This feeling is so strong that it destroys every other feeling. Compared with it, Bloom's little sentiments of pity and love for his dead son are ridiculous.

And Marion Tweedy's strong physical passions are torn away from the rest of the book

I now turn to *The Ambassadors*, *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl* which represent a return to the 'International Scene' of the earlier novels. But *The Golden Bowl* forms also a synthesis with the novels of the middle period, such as *The Awkward Age* and *The Sacred Fount*, in which the pattern is particularly emphasized

*The Golden Bowl* is extremely simplified, because there are only four main characters and two subsidiary choric figures, and no one else is of the slightest importance. The key to the situation is the fact that there are, in effect, before the action begins, two original groupings. Maggie is the companion of her father, Mr Verver, and they live together in their relationship always gaily referred to as their marriage. Meanwhile, unknown to them, their two future *spousi*—as they are always called—Amerigo, the prince, and Charlotte, an adventurous, moneyless, 'wonderful' friend of Maggie, are having their little affair. The leading choric character, Mrs Assingham, now steps in and breaks up the grouping from AB, CD—Maggie, Mr Verver, the Prince, Charlotte, into AC, BD. The prince marries Maggie. Maggie is now deeply conscious of the loneliness of her father, and her father is also conscious that her concern for him may not be best for her marriage. Meanwhile Charlotte returns from America, and, just before the wedding, she walks through Mayfair with the prince, where, in a curio shop, they look at the golden bowl with a flaw in it, which they discuss, but decide not to buy, for Maggie's wedding present. After the marriage, Charlotte stays with the Ververs, and then Mr Verver takes her to Brighton, and proposes to her. They marry, and soon after the marriage, the prince and Charlotte start living together. Thus, after a transition,

in which the figures are AC, BD, we return to the original order AB, CD. The dramatic climax of the book is Maggie's passionate fight to restore the order of the marriages, which she at last succeeds in doing. Thus the book falls into this sort of pattern —

( <i>Spectators</i> ) —	AB	CD
	The Golden Bowl	
The major and	AC	BD The major and
Fanny Assingham	AB	CD Fanny Assingham
	The Golden Bowl	
	AC	BD

This symmetry symbolizes the social order.

The golden bowl with its flaw represents, of course, the flaw in the order of their lives.

The moral problem in the book is extremely important. It is not merely a struggle between the injured and duped father and child and the strident aristocratic sensual lovers, who are living on the money of the weaker couple, which would resemble the situation of *The Wings of the Dove*. There is a far deeper conflict, between the two kinds of marriage, the spiritual and the platonic. Maggie will not abandon her father: the injury done to the *spousi* is that the marriages have been arranged—Maggie's in part, Mr Verver's entirely—simply in order to improve the relationship of the father and daughter. Mrs Assingham, who arranges the first marriage, knows that in providing his daughter with a prince, she is also providing Mr Verver with an invaluable 'piece' for his collection. Moreover, the father and daughter agree that their life is too closed-in, too selfish, that they see too little of the world, that they are altogether lacking in free air and large experience, and Maggie's marriage presents an excellent way out.

Both marriages having been made, the father and daughter continue to see a good deal of each other, so it follows that stepmother and son-in-law are also thrown together. Moreover, the platonic relationship of the daughter and father not only competes with the relationship of Charlotte and Amerigo, it also affects a third concurrent relationship, which is the sexual life of each party with his or her marriage partner. The platonicism of the father and daughter evidently creeps into their marriages. Charlotte suffers most from this, because her husband is in any case an old man, and although the suggestion that he is wonderfully young is bravely kept up—it becomes part of the system of the book—he cannot have a child. Maggie has a child—the Principino—but she does not satisfy her pleasure-loving Italian husband. He is politely but infinitely bored by the Ververs. Finally, Maggie is passionately and deeply in love with the prince-like Cordelia, she recognizes that her love for her husband is deeper even than that for her father, to that extent the marriage is not in the least a marriage of convenience.

Thus the moral problem much more decisively demands an answer in this than in any other book of James. Maggie is not in the position of Milly or Strether, who have only to live according to their lights, and then to lose everything. In James's other books he has convinced us that a part of life, of the *real* life of a human being, as apart from the performance of an automaton, is the power to choose to die. Milly is only one of the many tens of characters who choose to die. The question James has not yet answered is whether it is possible in the modern world to choose to live; and Maggie triumphantly answers it for him.

Her answer takes her far beyond the æsthetics of behaviour, although, like all James's characters, she is

deeply concerned with these. She lives and saves the situation by the force of her patience, her generosity and her love. Twice she affirms a faith that is also her policy. Once to Mrs Assingham, who, being the original match-maker, unifies the sense of moral responsibility which weighs on all the characters.

'Maggie thoughtfully shook her head. "No, I'm not terrible, and you don't think me so. I do strike you as surprising, no doubt—but surprisingly mild. Because—don't you see?—I *am* mild. I can bear anything."

"Oh, 'bear'!" Mrs Assingham fluted.

"For love," said the Princess.

Fanny hesitated. "Of your father?"

"For love," Maggie repeated.

"It kept her friend watching. "Of your husband?"

"For love," Maggie said again.

Once more, at the end of the book, Maggie reaffirms her declaration, this time to her father, when in their most wonderful confabulation the father and daughter, without ever betraying their loyalty to their marriages, or revealing to each other their knowledge of the intrigue between Charlotte and the prince, reveal only, indeed, their anxious tenderness for each other, their unshaken belief in each other, and that their understanding went deeper than anything which they need say.

'My idea is this, that when you only love a little you're naturally not jealous—or are only jealous also a little, so that it doesn't matter. But when you love in a deeper and intenser way, then you are, in the same proportion, jealous, your jealousy has intensity and, no doubt, ferocity. When, however, you love in the most abysmal and unutterable way of all—why, then you're beyond everything, and nothing can pull you down.'

The scene of *The Golden Bowl* is the most ambitious

he ever attempted, and the first half of the book, allotted to the prince, does really little more than construct the vast stage on which his drama is enacted. That stage is set in England, but upon it meet America and Italy. Italy is represented by Amerigo, so that his ancestry recalls the greatness and the crimes of the Empire. America, with all its wealth and all its innocence, is Adam Verver and his daughter.

Set against this great historical and geographical tradition, there is the strangely insulated, shut-off life of the actors. The two married couples, on this immense stage, in their admired and plausible surroundings, are yet living a life which is grotesquely at odds with their happy setting of envied appearances, and unsuited to the standards of the tradition to which they are trying to conform. They are perpetually at the edge of something quite sordid—of the divorce court, the reported evidence of servants, and love-letters printed in the news. The struggle of the Ververs is a struggle to make the picture fit the frame, they are constantly struggling to make their lives worthy of their dead surroundings.

They are handicapped in this endeavour by two psychological difficulties. The first is that the Ververs are absorbed in their own private life, whereas the people they marry are, in a modern, almost in a journalistic, sense, suited to the public life. The Ververs are a lovable, cosy pair of very simple, very clever people who are immensely rich. It is emphasized throughout the book that everything about them is, by mere contrast with their huge setting, very small. Their virtues are a human understanding which does not extend beyond the individuals immediately around them, an immense personal tenderness, and a love which hardly reaches further than each other and the pair whom they marry. The

word 'small' is constantly associated with Maggie, and it is she who in one of her moments of greatest exaltation realizes that her father was 'simply a great and deep and high little man, and that to love him with tenderness was not to be distinguished, a whit, from loving him with pride' One remembers him always, with his dim smile, his quiet, very youthful manner, in the unassuming little scene, gazing at a 'piece' in his collection, or wandering vaguely about his garden On the other hand, everything about Charlotte and the prince is on the grand scale As Maggie says when she recommends Charlotte to her father, 'I may be as good, but I'm not so great—and that's what we're talking about She has a great imagination She has, in every way, a great attitude She has above all a great conscience'

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But the most extraordinary scenes of all, are those with Charlotte at the end of the book They follow on that very remarkable climax when Mrs Assingham deliberately throws down and smashes the golden bowl, which Maggie has accidentally bought from the shop in Mayfair and bought with it, too, the knowledge that Charlotte and her husband were deeply intimate before her marriage The prince comes into the room, and just because he is let off having to explain, he learns all the more clearly that Maggie knows, has always known, and also that she does not require any explanation This is the first step in his conversion to Maggie, and he marks it by *not* telling Charlotte that Maggie knows thus Charlotte is in the dark, and Maggie and the prince are together, as it were, in the light of Maggie's generosity The ground is thus elaborately prepared for the description of that terrible evening when Charlotte, 'the splendid shining supple creature was out of the cage, was at large' James is at his most prodigious in the description of the meeting of the two women, and of the high spirit with which Maggie tells her wonderful lie, denying that Charlotte has done

her any injury, and thus keeping her compact of silence with the prince 'They were together thus, he and she, close, close together—whereas Charlotte, though rising there radiantly before her, was really off in some darkness of space that would steep her in solitude and harass her with care' But the scene ends with Charlotte's triumph, for the nature of Maggie's victory is precisely in letting Charlotte enjoy her own value, which is greatly to triumph. On this occasion the triumph is in the form of a public embrace 'But there was something different also, something for which, while her cheek received the prodigious kiss, she had her opportunity—the sight of the others, who, having risen from their cards to join the absent members of their party, had reached the open door at the end of the room and stopped short, evidently, in presence of the demonstration that awaited them'

This scene, as though it demands an encore, is followed by a parallel scene in the daytime, when Maggie goes out into the garden on the excuse of taking Charlotte a book which she had forgotten. Here again the patient and loving resolve of Mr Verver, who has now played his part in deciding that he and Maggie must separate and that he must go with his wife to America, is made part of Charlotte's indignant triumph.

These scenes, in their vast, resonant setting, and extending into variations in Maggie's thought, have the air of those *surréaliste* paintings in which one islanded, accurate object, perhaps a house, or a fragment of ruined stone wall, is seen against an empty background which seems perhaps to be the whole sea, or the whole sky, or the whole of space.

For the monologues dip over into an abyss where they become part of the unconscious mind of Europe. They are written in a language in which one loses oneself among

the whole theme Each joke stands by itself, and the many jokes have the air of being a constantly repeated variation on one joke, not parts of one gigantic, inclusive joke Secondly, when we come to Stephen and his ash-plant, in spite of the most strenuous and erudite efforts, the joke breaks down, Stephen is pedantic and ponderous, and it is impossible to take him as seriously as Bloom, and therefore impossible to be funny about him Thirdly, the humour is strained, because, like the character of Stephen, the book itself seems often to be forced, almost to breaking-point The author seems determined, at whatever cost, to write a masterpiece, which, however much it may be distorted and broken up, is yet completely in the tradition of *Madame Bovary* and all the classics So that the book wears a thick surface polish, and one is made on every page to realize that, however disrupted the separate parts may seem, they do all in some intricate and secret way fit together and conform to a pattern, the key to which may be found in *The Odyssey* The book is made complete in itself, with no loose ends, in fact, the finale is made as decisive and emphatic as possible A great hunk of prose is written, which ends off the book like a massive stone monolith This attempt at a forced perfection seems to me an error of taste, as gross as that of making Stephen a writer It illustrates James's immense superiority as an artist, to reflect that his last books do not aim at a completion to compare with *Ulysses* The end of *The Wings of the Dove*, although it kills Milly, only brings us back to another beginning The book starts off with a description of the relationship of Kate and Martin, and it ends with a slight modification of that relationship which gives it a 'fresh start' *The Golden Bowl* ends also with a new beginning, it describes the termination of Maggie's 'marriage' with

her father, and it opens out on to another unwritten volume which would describe the married life of Charlotte and Mr Verver in America *The Ambassadors* breaks off at the point where a new and fascinating book might describe Strether's life alone, after he had been forsaken by Chad and Mrs Newsome It is part of James's method to allow his books gently to flow into the life around us It is interesting to reflect that his books always end at the point where the action of his characters becomes most credible having explained how these exceptional cases do fit into the life which we all know, he leaves us with them, and them with us

*Ulysses* fails then as *comédie humaine* As tragedy, it is too studied, and the use of the corpse in the play scene brings with it a strong whiff of stage settings in grand opera

Apart from the humour, the strongest emotion in *Ulysses* is an overpowering sense of sin It is perhaps this which made T S Eliot remark in *After Strange Gods* that 'the most ethically orthodox of the more eminent writers of my time is Mr Joyce,' and, again, that his work is 'penetrated with Christian feeling' We are dealing here, of course, with a side of Christianity which has nothing to do with Christ For there is no evidence that Christ had a fascinated sense of the wickedness of the body, and it is this physical obsession which permeates *Ulysses* Sin and death are all that is left of the Church even There is no belief in salvation, that has been thrown overboard by Stephen in *A Portrait of the Artist*, only a nightmare vision of a world smelling with the dregs of a hated Catholicism, endless sin and no salvation. This feeling is so strong that it destroys every other feeling Compared with it, Bloom's little sentiments of pity and love for his dead son are ridiculous.

And Marion Tweedy's strong physical passions are torn away from the rest of the book

I now turn to *The Ambassadors*, *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl* which represent a return to the 'International Scene' of the earlier novels. But *The Golden Bowl* forms also a synthesis with the novels of the middle period, such as *The Awkward Age* and *The Sacred Fount*, in which the pattern is particularly emphasized

*The Golden Bowl* is extremely simplified, because there are only four main characters and two subsidiary choric figures, and no one else is of the slightest importance. The key to the situation is the fact that there are, in effect, before the action begins, two original groupings. Maggie is the companion of her father, Mr Verver, and they live together in their relationship always gaily referred to as their marriage. Meanwhile, unknown to them, their two future *spousi*—as they are always called—Amerigo, the prince, and Charlotte, an adventurous, moneyless, 'wonderful' friend of Maggie, are having their little affair. The leading choric character, Mrs Assingham, now steps in and breaks up the grouping from AB, CD—Maggie, Mr Verver, the Prince, Charlotte, into AC, BD. The prince marries Maggie. Maggie is now deeply conscious of the loneliness of her father, and her father is also conscious that her concern for him may not be best for her marriage. Meanwhile Charlotte returns from America, and, just before the wedding, she walks through Mayfair with the prince, where, in a curio shop, they look at the golden bowl with a flaw in it, which they discuss, but decide not to buy, for Maggie's wedding present. After the marriage, Charlotte stays with the Ververs, and then Mr Verver takes her to Brighton, and proposes to her. They marry, and soon after the marriage, the prince and Charlotte start living together. Thus, after a transition,

in which the figures are AC, BD, we return to the original order AB, CD. The dramatic climax of the book is Maggie's passionate fight to restore the order of the marriages, which she at last succeeds in doing. Thus the book falls into this sort of pattern —

( <i>Spectators</i> ) —	AB	CD
	The Golden Bowl	
The major and	AC	BD The major and
Fanny Assingham	AB	CD Fanny Assingham
	The Golden Bowl	
	AC	BD

This symmetry symbolizes the social order.

The golden bowl with its flaw represents, of course, the flaw in the order of their lives.

The moral problem in the book is extremely important. It is not merely a struggle between the injured and duped father and child and the strident aristocratic sensual lovers, who are living on the money of the weaker couple, which would resemble the situation of *The Wings of the Dove*. There is a far deeper conflict, between the two kinds of marriage, the spiritual and the platonic. Maggie will not abandon her father: the injury done to the *spous* is that the marriages have been arranged—Maggie's in part, Mr Verver's entirely—simply in order to improve the relationship of the father and daughter. Mrs Assingham, who arranges the first marriage, knows that in providing his daughter with a prince, she is also providing Mr Verver with an invaluable 'piece' for his collection. Moreover, the father and daughter agree that their life is too closed-in, too selfish, that they see too little of the world, that they are altogether lacking in free air and large experience, and Maggie's marriage presents an excellent way out.

Both marriages having been made, the father and daughter continue to see a good deal of each other, so it follows that stepmother and son-in-law are also thrown together. Moreover, the platonic relationship of the daughter and father not only competes with the relationship of Charlotte and Amerigo, it also affects a third concurrent relationship, which is the sexual life of each party with his or her marriage partner. The platonicism of the father and daughter evidently creeps into their marriages. Charlotte suffers most from this, because her husband is in any case an old man, and although the suggestion that he is wonderfully young is bravely kept up—it becomes part of the system of the book—he cannot have a child. Maggie has a child—the Principino—but she does not satisfy her pleasure-loving Italian husband. He is politely but infinitely bored by the Ververs. Finally, Maggie is passionately and deeply in love with the prince, like Cordelia, she recognizes that her love for her husband is deeper even than that for her father; to that extent the marriage is not in the least a marriage of convenience.

Thus the moral problem much more decisively demands an answer in this than in any other book of James. Maggie is not in the position of Milly or Strether, who have only to live according to their lights, and then to lose everything. In James's other books he has convinced us that a part of life, of the *real* life of a human being, as apart from the performance of an automaton, is the power to choose to die. Milly is only one of the many tens of characters who choose to die. The question James has not yet answered is whether it is possible in the modern world to choose to live, and Maggie triumphantly answers it for him.

Her answer takes her far beyond the æsthetics of behaviour, although, like all James's characters, she is

deeply concerned with these. She lives and saves the situation by the force of her patience, her generosity and her love. Twice she affirms a faith that is also her policy. Once to Mrs Assingham, who, being the original match-maker, unifies the sense of moral responsibility which weighs on all the characters.

'Maggie thoughtfully shook her head. "No, I'm not terrible, and you don't think me so. I do strike you as surprising, no doubt—but surprisingly mild. Because—don't you see?—I *am* mild. I can bear anything."

"Oh, 'bear'!" Mrs Assingham fluted.

"For love," said the Princess.

Fanny hesitated. "Of your father?"

"For love," Maggie repeated.

"It kept her friend watching. "Of your husband?"

"For love," Maggie said again.

Once more, at the end of the book, Maggie reaffirms her declaration, this time to her father, when in their most wonderful confabulation the father and daughter, without ever betraying their loyalty to their marriages, or revealing to each other their knowledge of the intrigue between Charlotte and the prince, reveal only, indeed, their anxious tenderness for each other, their unshaken belief in each other, and that their understanding went deeper than anything which they need say.

'My idea is this, that when you only love a little you're naturally not jealous—or are only jealous also a little, so that it doesn't matter. But when you love in a deeper and intenser way, then you are, in the same proportion, jealous, your jealousy has intensity and, no doubt, ferocity. When, however, you love in the most abysmal and unutterable way of all—why, then you're beyond everything, and nothing can pull you down.'

The scene of *The Golden Bowl* is the most ambitious



he ever attempted, and the first half of the book, allotted to the prince, does really little more than construct the vast stage on which his drama is enacted. That stage is set in England, but upon it meet America and Italy. Italy is represented by Amerigo, so that his ancestry recalls the greatness and the crimes of the Empire. America, with all its wealth and all its innocence, is Adam Verver and his daughter.

Set against this great historical and geographical tradition, there is the strangely insulated, shut-off life of the actors. The two married couples, on this immense stage, in their admired and plausible surroundings, are yet living a life which is grotesquely at odds with their happy setting of envied appearances, and unsuited to the standards of the tradition to which they are trying to conform. They are perpetually at the edge of something quite sordid—of the divorce court, the reported evidence of servants, and love-letters printed in the news. The struggle of the Ververs is a struggle to make the picture fit the frame, they are constantly struggling to make their lives worthy of their dead surroundings.

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## HENRY JAMES

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imagery which is poetry, but which has not the rhythm or the diction of a writer who is completely a poet. The particular effects in *The Golden Bowl* fail, but the total effect of the book is as striking as the third movement—the *Heiliger Dankgesang*—of Beethoven's Quartet in A Minor, Opus 130. In that movement, the drawn-out, religious harmonies are contrasted with the two islands of feverish dramatic ecstasy, which they enclose, like an endless, calm sea.

Throughout *The Golden Bowl* the descriptive passages deliberately suggest vast spaces opening out into mystery and vagueness. 'This love of music, unlike his other loves, owned to vaguenesses, but, while, on his comparatively shaded sofa, and smoking, smoking, always smoking, in the great Fawns drawing-room as everywhere, the cigars of his youth, rank with associations—while, I say, he so listened to Charlotte's piano, where the score was never absent, but, between the lighted candles, the picture distinct, the vagueness spread itself about him like some boundless carpet, a surface delightfully soft to the pressure of his interest.' Here Mr Verver is set like a little island against his sea of vagueness.

It is from this deliberately conjured atmosphere that there arise, as from the depths, the dream images of the unconscious. Too often these images, not being ordered by metric, almost overwhelm the reader, swamping all other associations, and making him forget the story. 'She might fairly, as she watched them, have missed it as a lost thing, have yearned for it, for the straight vindictive view, the rights of resentment, the rages of jealousy, the protests of passion, as for something she had been cheated of not least a range of feelings which for many women would have meant so much, but which for *her* husband's wife, for *her* father's daughter, figured nothing nearer to

experience than a wild eastern caravan, looming into view with crude colours in the sun, fierce pipes in the air, high spears against the sky, all a thrill, a natural joy to mingle with, but turning off short before it reached her and plunging into other defiles' Before we have fully recovered, in the same paragraph, Maggie has another vision one which, in the story, is of far greater significance than the first, because of the light in which it presents Charlotte 'She saw at all events why horror itself had almost failed her, the horror that, foreshadowed in advance, would, by her thought, have made everything that was unaccustomed in her cry out with pain, the horror of finding evil seated, all at its ease, where she had dreamed only of good, the horror of the thing hideously *behind*, behind so much trusted, so much pretended, nobleness, cleverness, tenderness'

It is the feeling of horror, of foreboding before some calamity, that never fails, and that sometimes produces a poetry so pure and so dreadfully true of our whole situation, that it reaches far beyond the 'small despair' of the Ververs One such passage occurs in the scene between Maggie and Fanny Assingham, just after Maggie has bought the golden bowl Fanny conceals what she knows from Maggie, for to relax the tension in Maggie's spirit would be the signal for her to collapse and despair what she knows about her husband she has to learn through her own suffering, so that she learns also the way out 'Though ignorant still of what she *had* definitely met, Fanny yearned, within, over her spirit, and so, no word about it said, passed, through mere pitying eyes, a vow to walk ahead and, at cross roads, with a lantern for the darkness and wavings away for unadvised traffic, look out for alarms'

It is such passages in James, which in their use of

imagery derived from everyday life, predict the best in modern poetry. But the feeling of a horror that is entirely modern is emphasized even more strongly, in the passages which describe the mental suffering of Maggie. When Maggie first tries to explain her position to Mrs. Assingham, she says. 'If I'm jealous—don't you see?—I'm tormented, and all the more if I'm helpless. And if I'm both helpless *and* tormented I stuff my pocket-handkerchief into my mouth, I keep it there, for the most part, night and day so as not to be heard too indecently moaning.'

Nor is this account of her torture any mere figure of speech. In her great scene with Charlotte, when Charlotte had triumphed, we are told 'Oh, the "advantage," it was perfectly enough, in truth, with Mrs. Verver, for what was Maggie's own sense but that of having been thrown over on her back with her neck, from the first, half broken and her helpless face staring up?' Maggie suffocates, she has for ever the sense of 'the beast at her throat.'

Nor is it only Maggie who endures these horrors. They pursue Charlotte, and one of the really terrifying moments is the description of Charlotte's lecture to some visitors on her husband's collection.

'The largest of these three pieces has the rare peculiarity that the garlands, looped round it, which as you see, are the finest possible *ciseaux Saxe* . . . ' etc, etc.

'So the high voice quavered, aiming truly at effects far over the heads of gaping neighbours . . . Maggie meanwhile, at the window, knew the strangest thing to be happening. she had turned suddenly to crying, or was at least on the point of it—the lighted square before her all blurred and dim. The high voice went on, its quaver was doubtless for conscious ears only, but there were verily thirty seconds during which it sounded, for our young woman, like the shriek of a soul in pain.'

The horror then pursues the prince. he has his own agonized way of sitting in his room and reading the newspapers, *Figaro* and *The Times*

When one considers these examples, one begins to feel certain that beneath the stylistic surface, the portentous snobbery, the golden display, of James's work, there lurk forms of violence and chaos. His technical mastery has the perfection of frightful balance and frightful tension beneath the stretched out compositions there are abysses of despair and disbelief. *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*.

What after all do these images of suffocation, of broken necks, of wailing, suggest but a collection of photographs of the dead and wounded during the Great War? We remember his phrase, made in 1915 'to have to take it all now for what the treacherous years were all the while really making for and *meaning*, is too tragic for any words.'



THE IVORY TOWER AND THE SENSE  
OF THE PAST

THE two last, posthumously published, novels of Henry James, *The Ivory Tower* and *The Sense of the Past*, both of which are unfinished, are in several ways completely different from any of the books that form the Collected Edition. *The Ivory Tower* is a novel with an American setting and an entirely contemporary subject. One may say of all James's other novels, even of the latest, that their characters could easily fit into the last generation of the nineteenth century. But in 1907 James visited America, and it is easy to see from *The American Scene* that this visit stimulated him greatly, and made him aware of the existence of a 'younger generation' which he had never yet described, and about which he was deeply curious.

His characters are equipped with plenty of 'modern' symptoms. The first one we meet, Rosanna Gaw, smokes like a chimney. One of her confidants, Davey Bradham, is a typically travelled and experienced American of to-day, who might almost be labelled a 'tough'. But for his half-a-dozen wrinkles, as marked as the great rivers of a continent on a map, and his thick and arched and active eyebrows, which left almost nothing over for his forehead, he would have scarce exhibited features—in spite of the absence of which, however, he could look in alternation the most portentous things and the most ridiculous. He would hang up a meaning in his large empty face as if he had swung an awful example on a

gibbet, or would let loose there a great grin that you somehow couldn't catch in the fact, but that pervaded his expanses of cheek as poured wine pervades water'

The portraits of the characters, of Rosanna, the full, calm, sympathetic daughter of the wrinkled old millionaire, Mr Gaw, who dies in a fit of pique because he wrongly believes that his crony, Betterman, is going to recover from an illness, of Graham and of his friend Horton, are so closely observed as to be almost photographic. There are scenes, such as the conversation of the dying Mr Betterman with his nephew Graham, at the party at Mrs Bradham's, which have as essentially the stamp of richest America as the most expensive productions of Hollywood. Every page of the book bears evidence that James had sharply turned back to the outer world, to the thing annotated and made use of, to the picture of life that was essentially modern.

In the character of the hero, Graham, James has, as he often did before, with Coleridge or Browning or Shelley, taken an enduring type of character, and watched his behaviour in a modern environment. Graham is the most successful of these experiments. On one occasion his type is revealed, when Horton Vint describes him as looking like 'a happy Hamlet'. I think there is no doubt that James was trying to 'do' Hamlet in modern dress.

Like Hamlet, Graham is consciously out of place, he is a sincere man who finds himself in a world in which he is compelled, self-consciously, to play a part. He has his confessor, Horton, who does not understand him, and who effectively betrays him. Horton is a kind of corrupt Horatio—a modern Horatio would of course be corrupt, a business man, in fact—who, although he cheats Graham, feels passionately towards him. Graham confesses, typically 'The extent, Vinty, to which I think I must just

*like to drift* ' He is full of doubts as to the reality of his own feelings In the course of the same conversation about drifting, Horton suggests to him that he may be afraid "Afraid? *Am I afraid?*" Graham fairly spoke with a shade of the hopeful, as if even that would be richer somehow than drifting ' But the most remarkable of these references is an image which is an unconscious echo of Shakespeare Horton is chiding Gray, as Graham is familiarly called, for his evasion of the social life that should accompany his wealth "Of course you may dig the biggest hole in the ground that ever was dug—spade-work comes high, but you'll have the means—and get down into it and sit at the very bottom Only your hole will become then the feature of the scene, and we shall crowd a thousand deep all round the edge of it " "

Not only does this image directly recall 'Ossa like a wart,' and the burial scene in *Hamlet*, but the conceit is Shakespearean To most readers, a difficulty in the style of James's later books, is that the images are poetic and do not naturally belong to prose

If Gray is a modern Hamlet, he is also a connexion of Maggie and Milly and Strether His life is, in fact, a development of theirs, just as his surroundings are also an extension of theirs into 'the rotten state of Denmark ' In the notes for the book James confesses to the resemblances, 'All of which makes him, I of course, desperately recognize, another of the "intelligent," another exposed and assaulted, active and passive "mind" engaged in an adventure and interested in *itself* by so being '

The peculiar interest of Gray is that, unlike the other 'minds,' he does not accept a rôle which is forced on him, but, finding himself out of place, he invents a rôle for himself, and, like Hamlet, he toys constantly with the idea of positive, consistent action, but does not altogether

indulge in it. His attitude to action is not weak, but neurotic and perverse. He rejects the opportunity to read a letter to him exposing his uncle, written by Mr Gaw on his death-bed, but he does not destroy the letter, he merely preserves it in an ivory tower. He refuses to take any action when he discovers that his friend Vinty, whom he has made manager of all his affairs, is cheating him. nor does he decide to let Vinty off. He is, in a word, self-absorbed to a degree which makes him quite unlike the unselfish Milly and Maggie and Strether. He is intensely interested in life as he sees it. Fundamentally he can always rely on the fact that he is indifferent, and that, just because he is so indifferent, the feelings of other people towards him, even of Haughty, are passionate. He is profoundly serious, but he is too disillusioned to take human relationship seriously.

It is possible for Maggie to be almost destroyed by the prince and Charlotte, because she believes that finally they are capable of being moved by, and responding to her love. Her love is not wasted. Gray feels that love is wasted. He is overwhelmed by the sense of social corruption, which seems to rob the lives of the people around him of all moral significance. This is also an aspect of Hamlet's character. Hamlet is introspective because he is isolated, his speeches are mostly soliloquies, because there is no one to whom he could say them. his surroundings are a mirror in which his gestures are merely reflected. the world of moral drama has to be created in his own soul.

The world of *The Ivory Tower*, in which James made a special effort to use the 'thing observed', in which he completes, as it were, the circle of his life's artistic achievement, and returns to what I have called the 'School of Experience' this world is quite shamelessly corrupt. Its

legend is the remark which Mr Betterman makes to Graham on his death-bed 'The enormous preponderance of money Money is their life' Davey Bradham remarks on one occasion, 'Of course, we are all incredibly corrupt' And, in the course of a very frank conversation with Cissy, the girl whom, if either of them had money, he might marry, Horton Vint makes a remark which is sufficiently a comment on his 'type' and on his relationship with Gray 'The dream of my life, if you must know all, dear—the dream of my life has been to be admired, *really* admired, admired for all he's worth, by some awfully rich man'

The behaviour and even the appearance of the characters is suited to this tune Cissy's relationship with Gray improves when she—quite uncritically—feels that Horton is absorbing Gray's income No one in the book seems older than thirty, and they nearly all behave as if they were eighteen. the dazzling sense of their youth is overshadowed by the enormous accumulation of the wealth on which they are living, and the terrible deaths of the two old men, surrounded by their doctors and nurses

This book is extremely important in its relation to the rest of James's work, because it shows, to the point of a final consistency, his view of the modern world It paints a picture of Hell unmitigated by æsthetic delights The relationships which were possible to Strether and Maggie are denied to Gray, and he has not even the faith to be an artist 'Heaven forbid he should "paint"—but there glimmers before me the sense of the connection in which I can see him as more or less covertly and waitingly, fastidiously and often too sceptically, conscious of possibilities of "writing" Quite frankly accept the complication or whatever of his fastidiousness, yet of his recognition withal of what makes for sterility His

"culture," his initiations of intelligence and experience, his possibilities of imagination, if one will, to say nothing of other things, make for me a sort of figure of a floating island on which he drifts and bumps and coasts about, wanting to get alongside as much as possible, yet always with the gap of water, the little island *fact*, to be somehow bridged over'

With his refreshed vision of the New World, the inner despair of *The Golden Bowl* and *The Wings of the Dove* has broken outwards, and in Gray's attitude we see a despair which echoes almost the despair of Baudelaire in his *Intimate Journals*. It is not too much to say that Gray takes pleasure in the pure evil of his friend's misappropriations, his 'profoundly nefarious attitude.' Gray sees money as evil, and money as civilization, and evil as breeding evil, and overshadowing civilization, and what distinguishes himself from the other people in his world is not his virtue, but simply his moral consciousness of evil, a consciousness in which he can rejoice.

If *The Ivory Tower* had been finished, it would have been possible to see that James had emerged from that period in his development which corresponds to the *Ulysses* period in Joyce, but that James, instead of inventing an inner language to correspond with *Work in Progress*, wrote books that open out into Lawrence's novels, and, more obviously, Faulkner's. Joyce's later work corresponds perhaps to the period in James of *The Golden Bowl*. Joyce is at the end of a period of elaboration, not at the beginning of a period of simplicity.

*The Ivory Tower* is, unfortunately, only a fragment containing several wonderful scenes—the scenes between Graham and his uncle, Graham and Rosanna Gaw, Graham and Horton Vint, and the garden party at Mrs Bradham's. James had finished less than a third of the

book, in its final version, when the Great War broke out, and, as Mr Percy Lubbock puts it, he 'found he could no longer work upon a fiction supposed to represent contemporary or recent life'

Accordingly he returned to the fantasy, *The Sense of the Past*, the first two books of which had been written some years previously, and then put aside. On December 2nd, when nearly four books were complete, he was attacked by his last illness. So that *The Sense of the Past* is also only a fragment. But the notes to it are even completer than those for *The Ivory Tower*, and the whole plot is outlined.

James was a sincere admirer of H. G. Wells's scientific romances, and when he wrote *The Sense of the Past* he may have been curious to invent his own Time Machine. But the manner in which his young hero, Ralph Pendrel, travels back a hundred years into the late eighteenth century, is not so much scientific, as literary and philosophic. When Ralph, the young American traveller, obsessed with his sense of the past, changes place with the young American, who, a hundred years ago, made the same journey, and who is obsessed with the sense of the Future, he achieves what Gertrude Stein would call a 'continuous present'. The young men do not meet half-way, in the middle of the century. Nor does the one sacrifice his present, in order to achieve the other's past. They both step into each other's shoes, and they do it by living in a time which is neither past nor future, but present. *The Sense of the Past* is, in fact, a product of the 'time obsession' which is typical of a whole school of modern literature, and is particularly found in Proust. It has all the symptoms of the school of literature which is brilliantly diagnosed by Mr Wyndham Lewis in his *Time and Western Man*.

When Ralph, in a moment of caution, before making his journey into the past, explains his case to the American Ambassador, he begins by explaining, 'You see, I'm not myself,' and the Ambassador understands him to mean that he combines in himself two persons. But Ralph, although he feels himself to be the other man, also feels that the other man is he. 'Our duality is so far from diminished that it's only the greater. The man ridden by curiosity about the Past *can't*, you'll grasp, be one and the same with the man ridden by his curiosity about the Future.'

Although the men are separate, each combines in himself the situation of both. The experiences of Ralph in the eighteenth century have already been gone through by his real predecessor.

Ralph is fascinated—when he takes over the old house which has been left to him in the London Square—by the portrait of a young man, who is painted looking away from the painter. The whole situation hangs on this picture, on the sense that the young man is turned away from his contemporaries towards the Future, just as Ralph is turned towards the Past. It is with this young man that he changes places, and also the portrait is a painting of himself. One of the finest effects which James proposes in his notes is the account of the painting of this portrait, so disturbing to the painter, who is profoundly shocked by his intuition of the strangeness in Ralph. Thus, in the account of the portrait, a continual series of transformations is suggested, by which the six months of Ralph's visit to the eighteenth century is made perpetually recurrent, because when he is attracted by the portrait he is attracted by himself, and, when he is stepping into the eighteenth century, he is repeating an action which he must already have made before, in order that the portrait should have been painted



This suggestion of a repeated Present is like a nail (as James would put it, a 'silver nail') hammered through the book. Unfortunately the idea is not fully worked out in the parts of the book that are completed, and in the notes the whole force of what is implied seems to be realized—very exceptionally for James—almost as an afterthought.

There is another idea, also a nail which fixes the situation. This depends on the important provision that there are, after all, two young men, and that Ralph's journey into the Past has always its parallel of the other young man's journey into the Future. Ralph immediately grasps, when he steps into the eighteenth-century drawing-room—the drama hangs on his having such intuitions—that he is engaged to Molly Midmore. But his most important divergence—his really anachronistic act—is to fall in love with her sister Nan. This is not only unexpected and a part of his ghostly attribute of strangeness (he is always a ghost: this book is the biography of a ghost, and the other characters are also ghosts to him) to the eighteenth-century family, but also it is literally unprecedented by the other young man. A further complication arises here, because Nan is also in love with him, as well as he with her: that is to say, she is in love with him because she believes him to be the other young man, the young man who is now in the Future, because she has gone through the experience of being in love with him in the Past. Not only does Ralph cast a shadow into the Future, but also the Midmores cast a shadow into the Past. Or, rather, they cast a shadow into what is their Reality, which depends on Ralph being a real contemporary, and their situation has likewise its real precedent, which Ralph is only copying, in which an American young man did marry Molly

Midmore, and was secretly loved by the younger sister, although he did not respond to her passion. As it is, the younger sister saves the situation, because she is able to understand Ralph's secret, and thus help him to get back into the twentieth century.

*The Sense of the Past* is, of course, fantasy, but fantasy is one of the most important aspects of James's art. James quotes *The Turn of the Screw* as his precedent in writing the book, and I have tried to show that that story is a serious study.

*The Sense of the Past* is a triumphant variation on the familiar theme of the International Situation. The young man brings America to Europe, and we have a conflict which is the subject of many of James's stories. But here the situation is given another dimension, because the young man is travelling not only through distance, but also through time. It is no wonder that James looked on Ralph as a means of escape from the Europe of the War, because he is not only a geographical traveller who seeks to make James's work part of a wider culture than the American culture (this is a purpose of all his emissaries), but he is also a traveller who seeks to give James's work a wide, historical basis. He is escaping from the fear that the novel which relies for its subject-matter on contemporary life, is itself as transitory as the violent, and hence transitory, civilization which it describes, a civilization which at any moment may be engulfed in war or destroyed by suicidal economic collapse.

Ralph in his time-journey succeeds in vindicating a moral, which James always clung to, but the last shreds of which seemed to be consumed in the flames of *The Ivory Tower*.

He vindicates the good, puritan American brand of



completely opposite poles. The one represents an unprecedented awareness of the Present, and is, indeed, for James, almost a flight into the Future, the other represents reaction, and a violent flight into the Past. Between these two poles lies a whole school of modern literature, which takes us far beyond James, amongst our immediate contemporaries.





## A BRIDGE

HIS unique individuality makes it difficult to bridge the gulf between James and any other writer. The gulf is no mere matter of time. Compare him with Wilde or any other of his *Yellow Book* contemporaries, and the gulf is wider than between him and Yeats, in his later period, or even Lawrence or Joyce.

His problems were essentially those of writers that followed him, and not those of his contemporaries. Modern writing has not even in Lawrence entirely forsaken the aristocracy which James described. Hermione in *Women in Love*, and Lady Chatterley, are both Jamesian characters, though James would have been surprised at their setting. That remarkable story *The Altar of the Dead* has echoes both in Joyce's story, *The Dead*, and in Eliot's criticism. The side of James which is illustrated in stories of ghosts and magic, such as *The Turn of the Screw* and *Owen Wingrave*, is illumined by an examination of Yeats's spiritualism. *The Sense of the Past* succeeds in creating a legend by which James escaped from the present, and was able to rest securely in traditional beliefs that would have been contradicted, had he looked for affirmation in the War. One finds the same legend expressed in Yeats

'Midnight has come, and the great Christ Church Bell  
And many a lesser bell, sound through the room,  
And it is All Souls' Night,

And two long glasses brimmed with muscatel  
Bubble upon the table. A ghost may come,  
For it is a ghost's right,  
His element is so fine  
Being sharpened by his death,  
To drink from the wine-breath  
While our gross palates drink from the whole wine.  
I need some mind that, if the cannon sound  
From every quarter of the world, can stay  
Wound in mind's pondering,  
As mummies in the mummy-cloth are wound,  
Because I have a marvellous thing to say,  
A certain marvellous thing  
None but the living mock,  
Though not for sober ear,  
It may be all that hear  
Should laugh and weep an hour upon the clock '

The true place of James is, then, not amongst his own contemporaries, but with ours. One should set *The Turn of the Screw* beside Yeats's poetry, *The Ambassadors* and *The Golden Bowl* beside *Ulysses*, the critical prefaces beside Eliot's criticism.



## VI

### YEATS AS A REALIST

W B YEATS is an isolated figure in modern writing, whose achievements at first seem only to be explained by his extreme individuality

His individuality is emphasized by the romantic line of his development, which is reminiscent of Goethe. He began as the writer of romantic, twilight poetry. Late in life, he is now writing his best poetry, most of which is inspired by contemporary political events, and by the lives of his friends. His awareness, his passionate rhythms, breaking away completely from the limp early work, remind one of the opening stanzas of Goethe's *West-Oestlicher-Drwan*, written also in a time of European revolution, following on a terrible series of wars

‘Nord und West und Sud zersplittern,  
Throne bersten, Reiche zittern,  
Flüchte du, im reinen Osten  
Patriarchenluft zu kosten!  
Unter Lieben, Trinken, Singen  
Soll dich Chisers Quell verjüngen’

compares with —

‘At midnight on the Emperor’s pavement flit  
Flames that no faggot feeds, nor steel has lit,  
Nor storm disturbs, flames begotten of flame,  
Where blood-begotten spirits come

And all complexities of fury leave,  
Dying into a dance,  
An agony of trance,  
An agony of flame that cannot singe a sleeve '

The command to flight, except into the pride of his own individualism, is not there in Yeats, at the end of his life he goes further than Goethe in renouncing his romanticism

Like Goethe, the stream of Yeats's romantic poetry was interrupted by his public life. The effect of politics on his writing was revolutionary

This development, which at first seems unique, was the result of three main influences: the influence on him of certain changes in social life that took place during his life and that of his friends, the influence of his interest in magic, the influence on him of symbolist theories of poetry

Although at one time he sought very consciously to root his poetry in the popular ballad poetry of Ireland, the literary influences which are to be found in his earliest, as in his most recent verse, are contemporary writing and writers. He does not go back, with the completeness of Eliot in *The Waste Land*, to the late Elizabethans, and achieve by his diction a striking historic comparison of the earlier period's greatness and decay with our own. His early poetry is, in spite of its ballad style (in fact, because of it), unashamedly of the 'eighties, just as his present writing is perhaps almost a little too dazzlingly 'modern'. As a young man, his friends were such men as Dowson, J. A. Symonds, Lionel Johnson and all the Rhymers. He was obviously, in his middle period, excited by the French symbolists: to-day it is not difficult to appreciate that he is an admirer of Ezra Pound and that he has read T. S. Eliot.

But his earlier work also shows that to a poet of his stature a contemporary influence, even when combined with a very great talent, is not enough. Beautiful as some of these poems are, they are enervating and contain a weariness of which Yeats seems, in his old age, quite incapable. One cannot imagine him saying to-day, 'I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree'—which calls up the image of a young man reclining on a yellow satin sofa. There would be a roar of thunder, a flash, and he would be off.

In *Adam's Curse* this sense of the inadequacy of his earlier inspiration seems to reach a climax. The poem is a dialogue between the poet and a woman, whose art of love is supposed to be as great as the poet's art of poetry. The poet first boasts of the trouble he takes over his versifying

'A line will take us hours maybe,  
Yet if it does not seem a moment's thought,  
Our stitching and unstitching has been nought'

Then he complains of being thought an idler

'By the noisy set  
Of bankers, schoolmasters, and clergymen  
The martyrs call the world'

Of whose air of reality, he seems oddly envious

The woman then replies, 'That we must labour to be beautiful,' and the poet, of course, concludes that she is referring to the difficult art of love.

The two speakers then sit silent and watching the day die and 'A moon, worn as if it had been a shell' Then the poem ends with the curious reflection

'I had a thought for no one's but your ears  
That you were beautiful, and that I strove  
To love you in the old high way of love,  
That it had all seemed happy, and yet we'd grown  
As weary-hearted as that hollow moon.'

This poem seems to mark the end of a phase, because the poet's inability to love in the old high way, and his feeling that the symbol of the moon was hollow, reveals a conscious dissatisfaction with his art

In the series of poems published in 1910 and called *The Green Helmet and Other Poems*, he seems tempted to abandon poetry altogether. In one of the poems he explains

'All things can tempt me from this craft of verse  
One time it was a woman's face, or worse—  
The seeming needs of my fool-driven land '

The weakness of the second line—only rescued by the dash and comma—indicates the writer's somewhat distracted mood. The inspiration of Yeats's best poetry is mostly occasional, but here the poems seem to have an altogether occasional nature, in the sense that they form the background to various activities which engaged Yeats at the time, and also to his preoccupation with Irish politics. There are poems on such subjects as *A Friend's Illness*, *At Galway Races*, *Upon a House shaken by the Land Agitation*. There is one poem called *The Fascination of What's Difficult*, in which he complains of the passing of inspiration.

Nevertheless, these poems contain a germ impregnated by the external world which grew up into the later poems. They seem to be a drying up, but, really, they

are the beginning of something quite different and new

The kind of poetry which is considerable as art and which is not based on a consciously sought-out tradition, is likely to be rooted deeply not so much in the writing of contemporaries, which forms its superficial soil, and which is merely an influence, as in the actual life of the time Yeats's book of *Autobiographies*—which form so strange a mixture of discretion and self-revelation—show how deep was his thirst for the life around him

The world of the *Autobiographies* is very different from that of *The Celtic Twilight*. The scene is, for the most part, London. The actors—and they were actors—are Lionel Johnson, Wilde, Morris, George Russell and all the literary and Irish-political figures of that time. These people are not in the least idealized, very few of them are fairies, and then only in a worldly sense, they are seen in a hard, clear, but undramatic light, and the sordid aspect of their lives—their drink, dope and debts—is not concealed

Yeats's attitude to what he calls the 'Tragic Generation,' the generation of *The Yellow Book* and the Rhymers' Club, was that of one who felt that their destiny was his own, and who yet felt dissatisfied with them and critical. The central point of his criticism was what involved him most deeply in his own work—the relation of their emotional, unbalanced lives to their accomplished, trance-like poetry. 'Another day,' he writes, when attempting to explain to himself the series of domestic tragedies that overcame so many of them, 'I think that perhaps our form of lyric, our insistence upon emotion which has no relation to any public interest, gathered together overwrought, unstable men, and remember, the moment after, that the first to go out of his mind had no lyrical

gift, and that we valued him mainly because he seemed a witty man of the world, and that a little later a man who seemed, alike as man and writer, dull and formless, went out of his mind, first burning poems which I cannot believe would have proved him, as the one man who saw them claims, a man of genius'

So that he was not only in contact with the literary movement of his time, he was also deeply involved with the people who made it. He took his tradition, not so much from books (as he had at first imagined he should do), as from the lives of those people who created his cultural environment, and whose lives presented a picture of civilization to him in its most vivid form. Their lives, deeply rooted in the lives of their ancestors, saturate his later poetry, especially the poetry of *The Tower*. I only wish sometimes that he had allowed his interest to extend still further, outside the immediate circle of his friends, into the social life that surrounded him.

I believe that what distinguished Yeats from those other writers is not so much—as Dr. Leavis has said—his power of self-criticism, as his realism. He is far too rhetorical a writer to be self-critical. It is clear from the style of his prose that he must constantly be presenting himself to himself in a dramatic manner, and his conversation gives the same impression. He is capable, because he has the highest intelligence, and because his rhetoric is not the rhetoric of the politician, of passionate seriousness, of penitence, and of an almost excessive sense of responsibility. No lines ring truer in his verse than

‘Things said or done long years ago,  
Or things I did not do or say  
But thought that I might say or do,  
Weigh me down, and not a day

But something is recalled,  
My conscience or my vanity appalled '

This verse shows how realism is not inconsistent with a certain romanticism, especially when it is self-dramatizing, and indeed one might say that it was Yeats's sense of reality which made him exploit his gift as a romantic poet, but he is certainly not a master of self-criticism, as Eliot is

Yeats was strengthened in his attitude to the life around him by certain of his intellectual experiences. The chief of these were the three influences of the Irish Literary Renaissance, Magic and Symbolism, and his interest in contemporary politics, which seem in the last years to have broadened into a prophetic concern (which resembles that of Stefan George, during and after the war) with the destiny of Europe.

At first sight the Irish Renaissance, so venomously featured by George Moore in his *Hail and Farewell*, seems inextricably tangled with the Magic and Symbolism. But actually it played a conflicting rôle in his work, directing it towards the Irish legends and the Celtic Twilight, whereas the Magic and Symbolism became essentially part of his approach to the world around him. One also has to distinguish between the Symbolism which had to do with the Magic and the Symbolism which was part of the symbolist movement in poetry. This close connexion between the mystery of magical symbols and the literary movement of H D, Ezra Pound and their followers, is typical of Yeats. However mysterious and shadowy it is, his poetry has always the stamp of success, and his magic invocations always have a slightly public air.

The beginnings of the Irish Renaissance were directed

towards creating a folk poetry which would be strictly Irish 'When Lionel Johnson and Katherine Tynan (as she was then), and I myself began to reform Irish poetry,' he writes (in a business-like way) in *Poetry and Tradition*, 'we thought to keep unbroken the thread running up to Grattan which John O'Leary had put into our hands, though it might be our business to explore new paths of the labyrinth We sought to make a more subtle rhythm, a more organic form than that of the older Irish poets who wrote in English, but always to remember certain ardent ideas and high attitudes of mind which were the nation itself, to our belief, so far as a nation can be summarized in the intellect' In the essay on *The Celtic Element in Literature*, in *Ideas of Good and Evil*, the subject-matter which is suitably Celtic is indicated This essay is a short account of the Celtic Sagas, and we are told how the Bards 'took the blossoms of the oak, and the blossoms of the broom, and the blossoms of the meadow-sweet, and produced from them a maiden the fairest and most graceful men ever saw, and they baptized her and called her the Flower Aspect' It is in this world of dream that *The Wanderings of Oisín* and the early ballad poetry moves

But even the Irish Renaissance dragged Yeats away from its own mysteries, and forced many practical problems upon his attention, and surrounded him with an active social life The Abbey Theatre was founded, and in it he must have met many people who were distressingly unlike the fairies of his dreams

Magic was closely linked with his Irish childhood He was so accustomed to think and speak of ghosts and fairies, that it is unlikely he could have completely escaped from their influence *The Celtic Twilight* is, as Forrest Reid remarks, 'thick with ghosts



Drumcliff and Rosses are the places where they are to be found thickest.' The 'good people' abound, and they carry off the souls of peasants.

As a young man in London, he scientifically developed his magical experiences by attending séances, visiting haunted houses, and calling on Madame Blavatsky. Mrs. Katherine Tynan Hincks (as she became) describes an alarming séance in which the spirits became very annoyed and where 'While Yeats was banging his head on the table as though he had a fit, muttering to himself, I had a cold repulsion to the whole business'.

His own descriptions of what happened at séances leave me with the same sort of bewilderment as do the daily sensational messages tapper out on turning tables. I am impressed by the appearance of a man in black and a hump-backed woman who are apparently engaged in making flesh by mechanical means, but I search vainly in myself for any scale of values which can make such appearances seem to have significance.

His own interest in these phenomena seems, at least partly, to have been a scientific curiosity, for they have little relation to the part that the theory of magic plays in his poetry. A system of magic forms his approach to certain problems, corresponding to the psychological approach of such writers as Joyce or Lawrence. In the essay on *Magia*<sup>1</sup> he writes:

'I believe . . .

(1) That the borders of our minds are ever shifting, and that many minds can flow into one another, as it were, and create or reveal a single mind, a single energy.

(2) That the borders of our memories are as shifting, and that our memories are a part of one great memory, the memory of Nature herself.

<sup>1</sup> *Irish of George Yeats* (1903) p. 29.

‘(3) That this great mind and great memory can be evoked by symbols

‘I often think I would put this belief in magic from me if I could, for I have come to see or to imagine, in men and women, in houses, in handicrafts, in nearly all sights and sounds, a certain evil, a certain ugliness, that comes from the slow perishing through the centuries of a quality of mind that made this belief and its evidences common over the world ’

I do not think that D H Lawrence would have quarrelled with these sentiments, although he may not have admired Yeats’s work Also, the whole passage is suited to appear in any psychological text-book

Later, he expands this belief into another observation, which explains the subject of much contemporary psychological literature

‘All men, certainly all imaginative men, must be for ever casting forth enchantments, glammers, illusions, and all men, especially tranquil men who have no powerful egoistic life, must be continually passing under their power Our most elaborate thoughts, elaborate purposes, precise emotions, are often, as I think, not really ours, but have on a sudden come up, as it were, out of hell or down out of heaven ’

This may be linked with his theory of symbolism, which is even more orthodoxly psychological

‘I cannot now think symbols less than the greatest of all powers whether they are used consciously by the masters of magic or half consciously by their successors, the poet, the musician and the artist At first I tried to distinguish between symbols and symbols, between what I called inherent symbols and arbitrary symbols, but the distinction has come to mean little or nothing Whether their power has arisen out of themselves, or whether it

has an arbitrary origin, matters little, for they act, as I believe, because the great memory associates them with certain events and moods and persons. Whatever the passions of man have gathered about, becomes a symbol in the great memory, and in the hands of him that has the secret, it is a worker of wonders, a caller up of angels or of devils.

His theory of symbolism led him firstly to search for a mysterious symbol which would contain everything outside the writer's self.

'By the help of an image  
I call to my own opposite, summon all  
That I have handled least, least looked upon.'<sup>1</sup>

By an inverse process, symbolism also leads to a universal significance being attached to certain images in his poetry, which in other romantic poetry would only remain details of observation or of invocation. It thus enables him to exploit to the utmost his very limited power of observing nature. George Moore has described how Yeats would walk about the country without ever looking at anything. The visual experiences of his whole life which have found their way into his poetry could probably be counted on the fingers of both hands. The Tower, the moorhen, the wild swans at Coole, a few trees (without leaves, for the most part), the winding stair, the fisherman, a hare, certain of his friends, have all the same significance in Yeats, as cats and negresses have in Baudelaire's poetry.

In the early symbolist poems, in *The Wind among the Reeds*, the symbolism, the magic and the twilight are all interwoven, and the symbols therefore lose power because they are not sufficiently isolated.

<sup>1</sup> From *Essays in Symbolism*

'I hear the Shadowy Horses, their long manes a-shake,  
 Their hoofs heavy with tumult, their eyes glimmering  
 white;

The North unfolds above them clinging, creeping night,  
 The East her hidden joy before the morning break,  
 The West weeps in pale dew and sighs passing away,  
 The South is pouring down roses of crimson fire'

Here the reader may fail to realize that far more than a  
 mere mood of trance is being conjured up the symbols all  
 really stand for something  
 Or when Yeats writes

'Do you not hear me calling, white deer with no horns?  
 I have been changed to a hound with one red ear,'

the reader, unless he is well up in magical practices, may  
 fail to realize that he means that he has really been  
 turned into a hound with one red ear

Symbols derived from witches and the moon, unless  
 they are used in some very particular sense, as in Baudelaire—in the sense that they are *evil*—naturally lose the  
 full force of an isolated crystal experience into which  
 the poet is gazing

It therefore happens that the method is most successful  
 when it is applied to objects which are, in the magical  
 sense, least symbolic. The friends of his youth whom he  
 names, the particular tower which he owns, the particular  
 fisherman whom he met,

'Although I can see him still,  
 The freckled man who goes  
 To a grey place on a hill  
 In grey Connemara clothes

At dawn to cast his flies,  
It's long since I began  
To call up to the eyes  
This wise and simple man '

about whom he wrote the

'Poem maybe as cold  
And passionate as the dawn '

Yeats is a poet who, finding himself in a desperate situation, has buttressed and shored up his work—as though it were, perhaps, his ancestral Tower—on every side. The reader is at every stage perplexed. First, he imagines that all is to be mystery and twilight and that he dare hardly listen, he must be so silent, for fear lest he disturb the fairies. To his disappointment he hears the fairy song grow fainter and fainter, until it disappears over the crest of the twilight hill. But Yeats has not disappeared. On the contrary, the reader now discovers that the fairies were only a part of a theory that by writing about them one could create a popular Irish ballad poetry. The fairies then merge into a theory of magic, but the magic, although much talked of, and although the poet never fails to produce a hush-hush solemn atmosphere, seems always to be something of a hoax. It has an element in it of spiritualist séances attended by a journalist, in order that he may broadcast his impressions of them.

In the first place, Yeats's attitude to magical events seems always to be that of a doctor instead of a witch doctor, and, in the second place, his poetry is only magical in the sense that he can produce a certain atmosphere. Yeats has written plenty of romantic poetry,

plenty of obscure poetry, some nonsense, and much mystification, but nothing which one could say was magical. Nothing, for instance, which has the magical quality of Eliot's poem, *The Hollow Men*. No lines to compare with

'Eyes I dare not meet in dreams  
In death's dream kingdom  
These do not appear:  
There, the eyes are  
Sunlight on a broken column  
There, is a tree swinging  
And voices are  
In the wind's singing  
More distant and more solemn  
Than a fading star '

Not even the magic, plus theories of symbolism and pure poetry, have enabled him to reproduce the effect of the line which he so admires in Nashe 'Brightness falls from the air'. Lastly, to complete his ambiguity, the result of the search for one symbol was the discovery that almost anything might become that symbol.

What one admires in Yeats's poetry is, in fact, not its mystery, its magic or even its atmosphere but its passion, its humanity, its occasional marvellous lucidity, its technical mastery, its integrity, its strength, its reality and its opportunism.

Why, then, is this romantic façade at all necessary? Or, since it exists, why does it not falsify the whole effect? The answer is that Yeats's poetry is devoid of any unifying moral subject, and it develops in a perpetual search for one. Although he has much wisdom, he offers no philosophy of life, but, as a substitute, a magical

system, which, where it does not seem rhetorical, is psycho-analytic, but not socially constructive. Reverent as he is, he does not convey any religion, instead, we are offered, in such poems as *Prayer for my Daughter*, an aristocratic faith. It is illuminating to consider what exactly Yeats does pray for his daughter, because presumably these are the qualities which he considers most important to a human being. (1) He wants her to be beautiful, but not too beautiful. (2) Courteous

(3) 'O may she live like some green laurel  
Rooted in one dear perpetual place'

(4) 'An intellectual hatred is the worst,  
So let her think opinions are accursed'

(Cf Henry James)

(5) 'And may her bridegroom bring her to a house  
Where all's accustomed, ceremonious,  
For arrogance and hatred are the wares  
Peddled in the thoroughfares  
How but in custom and in ceremony  
Are innocence and beauty born?  
Ceremony's a name for the rich horn  
And custom for the spreading laurel tree'

I have quoted the last verse in full because it shows how Yeats's rhetoric illustrates his thought, rather than develops it. This poem does a good deal to explain why Yeats should have taken refuge from the modern world at first in magic, and why in his later poems, although there is a great show of intellectualism, he rests really always on certain qualities, rather than ideas, such as breeding and courtesy. For the thought is hopelessly inadequate to his situation. And the reader who goes to Yeats hoping to find in his work thought

which is as profound as his contemporary awareness, goes away as a hungry sheep unfed

His awareness is shown best of all in that extraordinary poem *The Second Coming*

‘Things fall apart, the centre cannot hold,  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned,  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity’

The courageous acceptance of this poem makes the set of virtues which Yeats wishes his daughter seem more than ever unsuitable, and even impossible. Indeed, his insistence on aristocratic qualities of mind even limits his humanity, which is his greatest virtue. If one turns from *Prayer for My Daughter* to Wilfred Owen’s poem, *Strange Meeting*, one sees that Owen was already a poet of far deeper human understanding. These lines seem almost like an answer to Yeats’s *fortissimo* lyrics

“‘Strange friend,” I said, “here is no cause to  
mourn.”

“None,” said the other, “save the undone years,  
The hopelessness. Whatever hope is yours,  
Was my life also, I went hunting wild  
After the wildest beauty in the world,  
Which lies not calm in eyes, or braided hair,  
But mocks the steady running of the hour,  
And if it grieves, grieves richlier than here  
For by my glee might many men have laughed,  
And of my weeping something had been left



Which must die now I mean the truth untold,  
The pity of war, the pity war distilled.  
Now men will go content with what we spoiled  
Or, discontent, boil blood, and be spilled  
They will be swift with swiftness of the tigress,  
None will break ranks, though nations trek from  
progress

Courage was mine, and I had mystery,  
Wisdom was mine, and I had mastery,  
To miss the march of this retreating world  
Into vain citadels that are not walled  
Then, when much blood had clogged their chariot-  
wheels

I would go up and wash them from sweet veils  
Even with truths that lie too deep for taint.  
I would have poured my spirit without stint  
But not through wounds, not on the cess of war.  
Foreheads of men have bled where no wounds were.  
I am the enemy you killed, my friend."

Yeats has found, as yet, no subject of moral significance in the social life of his time. Instead of a subject, he offers us magnificent and lively *rapportage* about his friends. The only exception is in the poem called *The Second Coming*. He has put up a great many props, the largest prop of all being his own noble egotism. And he has created an atmosphere of legend. All the elements combine to produce the legend. In such poems as the second section of *The Tower* and *All Souls' Night*, Yeats's friends—the real characters from the *Autobiographies* and the fantastic characters from the early stories, and all the imagery of the earlier poetry—become inextricably mixed into a world of legend which, although it has no moral and no religion, provides authentically a personal vision of life.

## VII

### T. S. ELIOT IN HIS POETRY

T. S. ELIOT is, like Henry James, a naturalized New Englander, who, as a writer, rebels against the English lack of a consistent literary tradition. Unprecedented as his poetry seems in English, it is really a sharp corrective to contemporary writing, rather than a powerful and originating force. A great many of his effects, which seem at first most startling, are transfusions from the French: with him from Baudelaire and, especially, the French Symbolists. His earlier poetry is influenced by Laforgue.

But, unlike James, Eliot does not succeed completely as an original artist, whose work is the source flowing into a whole school of modern writing. In spite of the most extraordinary efforts to reconcile himself with tradition, and yet remain a poet living in the modern world, he has not succeeded in forming the kind of synthesis which one finds in James's work, which makes the later novels creatively imaginative, and yet psychologically more true to their time than the naturalistic books of the earlier period. Eliot seems anxious<sup>1</sup> to make nonsense of someone's calling *The Waste Land* the 'poem of a generation'. Yet it is easy to see in what sense this was meant, and in what sense it contains a truth. For in Eliot, as in a dozen other modern artists—as in Joyce, in Proust, in Baudelaire, in Rilke even—one never is far removed from connotation. from the

<sup>1</sup> In *After Strange Gods*

trick of the object, or the psychological symptom or the historic parallel, or the apt quotation quickly observed and noted down, always the one particular thing uniquely expressed and treated as a *symptom*. One notices further that there is a tendency in the work of all these artists to regard life as an illness and themselves (although they, too, are very seriously ill) as doctors or nurses or spiritual fathers, or mere affectionate holders of fading hands.

Eliot has not only the gift of connotation, but also a genius for describing a particular situation. In *The Waste Land* he seems, more than in any other poem, and more than any other artist, to describe the contemporary post-war situation of a certain very small class of intellectuals in Europe and America. Here, in expressing the situation of a small class, he goes much further than in any other earlier or later poem. For this longer poem seems to form a climax to all that he has as yet written, and the other poems, on the one side, ascend to that position, and on the other hand fall away from it. What one sees in the earlier as in the later poems is the experience of a purely isolated sensibility. Although he goes much further than James, in accepting the modern world, his subject-matter is even more limited than that of James. James at least describes a whole aristocratic class in terms that most people could, with a certain amount of application, understand. Eliot indicates the whole modern world but in a subjective way. A pub-crawling prostitute could understand very well what Henry James meant by the prince and Mr Verver; they are well within the range of her experience. But no charwoman or prostitute in London would recognize herself in the second part of the *A Game of Chess* section of *The Waste Land*, although it reports almost realistically the conversation of these ladies

in a London pub. This passage does not objectively present the people it describes; it merely exists in the mind of the reader, who is made to imagine that he is sharing the life of the people. But what he is really seeing and hearing is a part of his own mind.

Eliot's poetry is full of these fragmentary, intellectualized sense-impressions. They are romantically stimulating, because they suggest some very important private association. The key to modern romanticism is in the private poem, that is, the poetry of public appearances, which are, by the use of language, made full of private significance. Such is the *poésie de départ*, the poetry of the week-end visit to the country, the private jokes in Auden's work. The best example is the suggestion of Baudelaire in his *Intimate Journal*, that perhaps the ships which he observes anchored in the harbour are really pointing towards happiness.

The true descendant of Baudelaire is discovering not an outward reality, but, in external symbols, his own spiritual individuality. It follows that the objects outside himself have an added poignancy, because, in themselves, deprived of the poet's inventive genius, they are fragmentary and devoid of meaning. Modern life is a kind of Hell, but even that view has to be modified, it is, as it were, a fragmentary Hell, a Hell devoid of consistency, too stupid to punish anyone, and without moral severity. It is as impossible, according to the values of the modern world, to be damned as to be saved. In poems like the *Preludes*, the *Rhapsody on a Windy Night*, and *Morning at a Window*, Eliot extends this view of a world where

'Midnight shakes the memory  
As a madman shakes a dead geranium '



The original position is made clear enough in the opening lines of the *Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock*

'Let us go then, you and I,  
When the evening is spread out against the sky  
Like a patient etherised upon a table,  
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,  
The muttering retreats  
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels  
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells  
Streets that follow like a tedious argument  
Of insidious intent  
To lead you to an overwhelming question .  
Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"  
Let us go and make our visit'

This stanza admirably conveys the poet's situation. In the second and third lines nature is sacrificed by the mind, and the evening becomes a patient. Moreover, if one examines the form of the stanza one sees that it is simply and beautifully adequate to the mood and music of what is expressed, but that it has neither the freedom of so-called free verse, nor any architectural strength and cohesion of its own which extends beyond the purpose of the poem. A new stanza has been contrived but not invented. The clever line of 'Of insidious intent,' which seems so very effective, shows how completely the form will flop, if flopping suits Eliot's purpose. Yet the verse is musically arranged what is happening in it is that architecture is being sacrificed to expression by a parallel that exactly corresponds to the etherisation of the evening.

We turn over the page, and we meet the inmates of Hell

'In the room the women come and go  
Talking of Michelangelo.'

After a description of the fog, we are made aware of  
Mr Prufrock's feeling of social apprehension

'There will be time, there will be time  
To prepare a face to meet the faces that  
you meet'

Again

'And indeed there will be time  
To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"  
Time to turn back and descend the stair,  
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair—'

From an account of his clothes and his thoughts, we realize that Prufrock is not, as he at first seemed, a rebel to his surroundings. He is really completely a part of them, and his ambition seems to be, as he grows older, more and more ostensibly to 'fit in'. Yet a doubt arises in the reader's mind, because as he reads on he becomes convinced that Mr Prufrock's policy of conforming is really an ingenious method of saving himself. However, the matter is not quite so simple as that, because it becomes quite certain that Mr Prufrock has not the courage to make his proposal: this is important because the proposal is not merely a proposal. It has become identified with some statement, some assertion about life or the nature of the Universe, which, one becomes convinced, would, if it were made (and at the same time one feels quite sure it could not be made), settle the question of Mr Prufrock's salvation.

'And would it have been worth it, after all,  
 After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,  
 Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,  
 Would it have been worth while,  
 To have bitten off the matter with a smile,  
 To have squeezed the universe into a ball  
 To roll it toward some overwhelming question,  
 To say: "I am Lazarus, come from the dead,  
 Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all"—  
 If one, settling a pillow by her head,  
 Should say: "That is not what I meant at all;  
 That is not it, at all " "

There is no question in *Prufrock* of anyone else being saved; the others are part of the world of *things*, which is beyond admiration. the question is whether Mr. Prufrock himself is capable of getting out of it, of being alive

In the second poem in the book, *The Portrait of a Lady*, the question is whether the narrator feels himself essentially and in kind different from the lady whose life he knows to be false and decadent. The difficulty is that she herself (like everyone else belonging to a certain 'set') seems equally aware of the falsity of her surroundings, and she embarrasses her guest by understanding his attitude of considered superiority, and by translating her understanding into behaviour which ought to suit his superior moral situation. but which does not happen to be true to him. She accepts him at his own estimation, and then shocks him out of complacency by making an appraising remark which too palpably does not fit:

" "You are invulnerable, you have no Achilles' heel.  
 You will go on, and when you have prevailed  
 You can say, at this point many a one has failed." "



But the truth is very far from this

'I take my hat how can I make a cowardly amends  
For what she has said to me?  
You will see me any morning in the park  
Reading the comics and the sporting page'

Again, the problem we are left with is to consider whether the narrator is capable of personal salvation.

'Well' and what if she should die some afternoon,  
Afternoon grey and smoky, evening yellow and rose,  
Should die and leave me sitting pen in hand  
With the smoke coming down above the housetops,  
Doubtful, for a while  
Not knowing what to feel or if I understand  
Or whether wise or foolish, tardy or too soon  
Would she not have the advantage, after all?  
This music is successful with a "dying fall"  
Now that we talk of dying—  
And should I have the right to smile?

This poem is particularly interesting because it is one of Eliot's few attempts to enter into the position of another person in the modern Inferno. But even here the lady is only interesting because of the question about the narrator himself which she suggests in his mind. And her situation is only compared with his because the thought has occurred to him that it may be possible to identify it completely with his own. The seriousness of Eliot's earlier poetry is conveyed by the impression it forces that there is indeed only one problem: is the soul of the individual capable of being saved, damned or in any way morally judged? It is a question that applies to individuals, so it is no egotism of the author's that

makes him search deeply for the answer in himself the answer will be found in him as much as in anyone His is the one soul that it is his responsibility to save

In the light of his later poetry it is evident that just as Baudelaire was out to be damned, Eliot, perhaps more modestly, is out to be saved But at this stage the Church is only one of the humours of Hades

'The hippopotamus's day  
Is passed in sleep, at night he hunts,  
God works in a mysterious way—  
The Church can sleep and feed at once'

In 1920, when he wrote *Gerontion*, the picture of decay was transformed and took on the German features of a *Weltanschauung* Perhaps T. S. Eliot had already read Hermann Hesse's *Blick ins Chaos*, which is quoted in the notes at the end of *The Waste Land*, or perhaps it was Oswald Spengler, whose *Decline of the West* was more influential outside Germany at that time than it is to-day *Gerontion* is an old man, empty of desire, and whose activities are over, save for the 'thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season' He corresponds to Tiresias in *The Waste Land* His age, in the life of a single man, is as old as Western Civilization in the life of Civilizations (between 70 and 80), so he is particularly well qualified to be a sympathetic observer Like some of the more sensitive intelligences of our own age, he dreams of the more potent events of the past, and his past is identified with the past of Christian culture

' in the juvenescence of the year  
Came Christ the tiger '

The period of most heroic and eloquent activity in our history was the time of the Elizabethans. The motif of this poem is repeated, as it were, on another plane, by a passage written in a style plainly derived from Tourneur, in whom the energy and credulity of Elizabethan poetry had turned, in a last display of wild action and magnificent fireworks, into cynicism, despair, and a strong moral indignation. The passage in *Gerontion* beginning

'After such knowledge what forgiveness? Think now  
History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors  
And issues, deceives with whispering ambitions,  
Guides us by vanities,'

is reminiscent of some favourite lines of Eliot's from *The Revenger's Tragedy*

'Does the silkworm expend her yellow labours  
For thee? For thee does she undo herself?  
Are lordships sold to maintain ladyships,  
For the poor benefit of a bewildering<sup>1</sup> minute?  
Why does yon fellow falsify highways,  
And put his life between the judge's lips  
To refine such a thing—keeps horse and men  
To beat their valours for her?'

The diction, with its suggestion that what was once simple—the faith in which the age started, and the moral rules obvious to all—is now complicated and mysterious, is essentially alike. And Eliot, by his use of such language, which he adopts again in *The Waste Land*, not only gives the form of his verse an architectural strength which it had previously lacked, but he also achieves a

<sup>1</sup> In some editions, 'bewitching'

striking historical comparison of the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean writers with those of our own time. We think too often of the late Elizabethans as a group of writers who were overshadowed by the genius of Shakespeare, and of their writing as being a form that was breaking up, even if it was not actually decadent. What we never think enough of is the subject-matter of their writing, or of how far their attention and hence their creativeness was affected by the *outward scene*. Their attention was directed towards Italy—though this is often almost discounted: they are so English, we are told—and they were seeing and hearing, not the fabulous Renaissance and the revival of classicism, but the other side of the Renaissance: the political intrigues, the murders, the violence of cardinals, princes and politicians. Eliot, feeling himself in a Europe of cultural decay, unbelief, mass-murder, torture, political intrigue, usury and faithlessness, made the discovery that the late Elizabethans were describing a world which had much in common with our own.

*Gerontion* is an objective poem. It is in complete contrast to the preceding subjective poems. It no longer expresses the disgust and horror of one man at symptoms which one might after all believe to be purely subjective. It is written in the belief that the decline of civilization is real, that history is, as it were, now senile.

The same objectivity is observed in *The Waste Land*, for which one may take *Gerontion* almost as a study. *The Waste Land* is a restatement of the position which Eliot had reached in 1922, it forms a summary of the situations of the other poems, and besides this, it contains an objective element which the other poems had never expressed.

All the figures of the earlier poems are here. Most

important of all, there is Gerontion, grown into Tiresias, a more universal figure, because, not only is he old, and a wise spectator, but in him meet both the sexes. A lady, reminding us of her in *The Portrait of a Lady*, has collapsed completely, is nervous and conscious of failure. And Prufrock, now only a voice, is at last able to answer her questions.

'Speak to me Why do you never speak? Speak  
 "What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?  
 I never know what you are thinking Think"

I think we are in rats' alley  
 Where the dead men lost their bones'

Sweeney is here, and the company with which we associate him

'He, the young man carbuncular, arrives,  
 A small house agent's clerk, with one bold stare,  
 One of the low on whom assurance sits  
 As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire'

Secondly, Eliot has further extended the pastiche method of *Gerontion*. His fragmentary but extraordinary literary sensibility resembles his sensibility to a fragmentary world which surrounds him. As a poet, he is impressed in exactly the same way by lilac, say, as by a line of poetry such as '*Et O ces voix d'enfants, chantant dans la coupole*' and in the same way as the imagery of lilac is brought into juxtaposition with the cruelty of youth and the Waste Land, so the line from Verlaine is brought up against a tag from an Australian ballad

'O the moon shone bright on Mrs Porter  
 And on her daughter,  
 They wash their feet in soda water '

Eliot's method is justified, because he is entirely a literary writer, so there is no great contrast between his literary sensibility when it reacts to literature and when it reacts to real phenomena. Indeed, the two uses are sometimes combined, and even in his observation of real phenomena he will put his finger on the description in some book. For example, 'Simple and faithless as a smile and shake of the hand,' from 'Simple et sans foi comme un bonjour '

Eliot is the very opposite of everything that is meant by a 'nature poet'. He is never, like Lawrence (who is a genuine nature poet, as revolutionary in his power of invoking an objective world as Wordsworth) describing nature with his mind fixed on some object described, making the reader re-experience all the sensations aroused by that object. His mind is always on the poem, on what is created by the mind, and he picks out the phenomena observed by the mind, to suit the poem. He never appeals to a material reality outside the mind only, in his most recent poems, to a world of belief that is external to the individual mind.

I A Richards has said that in *The Waste Land* T S Eliot has effected a 'severance between his poetry and *all* beliefs.' . ' "In the destructive element immerse That is the way " ' "

I think that the last lines of *The Fire Sermon* section, 'O Lord thou pluckest me out' are not 'severed' from all belief. But what Eliot most certainly has done is to immerse himself in the destructive element. In *The Waste Land* he has made an artistic whole out of frag-

ments The poem is not built on the blank verse or free verse metres which are the basis of its separate parts The metre, so far from being architectural, helps to convey the sense of fragmentariness in the poem For example, a few lines of the last section of *What the Thunder Said*

'Here is no water but only rock  
Rock and no water and the sandy road  
The road winding above among the mountains  
Which are mountains of rock without water  
If there were water we should stop and drink,'

are not sequentially related to the mood and rhythm of *A Game of Chess* The lines I have quoted read like some fragment of rhetorical poetic drama *A Game of Chess* surprises us by its sensual, romantic mood, and *Death By Water* may take the reader to the Greek Anthology These fragments are not related to each other, but to the whole poem, they only contribute to each other in falling apart, and always suggesting to us that they are parts of something larger than their surroundings We are reminded of a ruined city in which the parts are all disintegrated, yet still together form a whole What remains in our minds is the whole poem, which is related to a series of fragments, not a series of fragments which are collected together to construct a whole poem

Instead of a basis of accepted belief, the whole structure of Eliot's poem is based on certain primitive rituals and myths, which, he seems to feel, must be psychological certainties, being a part of what psychologists call our 'race memory' He is appealing to scientific legend, where Yeats appeals to poetic legend The authority behind *The Waste Land* is not the Catholic Church, nor romantic lore, but anthropology from the volumes of Sir

James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* Eliot has tried to dedicate, beneath the very ephemeral and violent movements of our own civilization, the gradual and magical contours of man's earliest religious beliefs. The effect he sets out to achieve is illustrated by Freud's remark in *Civilization and its Discontents* that the growth of the individual mind resembles the growth of Rome, supposing that modern Rome, as it is to-day, were coexistent with the buildings of Rome at every period in her history, and that beneath the modern architecture was found the architecture of every earlier period, in a perfect state of preservation.

The method of *The Waste Land* is justified in so far as it fulfils the psychological truth observed by Freud. But Eliot's way of doing this is perhaps a little too studied. The poem seems to lean rather too heavily on Sir James Frazer, and *The Golden Bough* tends to form a private poem concealed in the real poem, in the same way as Joyce's private poem about the Odyssey is enshrined in *Ulysses*. The work is very slightly tainted by the learning of the Cambridge don. Perhaps the main reason for this is that, although Eliot's attitude is much more objective and generalized in *The Waste Land* than in any earlier poem, the psychology of his people is just as crude. His ladies, his bank clerks, his Sweeneys, his Mrs Porters, his pub conversationalists, are all part of the world of *things*. Psychologically they are far cruder than the Babbitts and other creations of Sinclair Lewis. One of the most astonishing things about Eliot is that a poet with such a strong dramatic style should seem so blinded to the existence of people outside himself. Yet the effect of his poetry depends very largely on this blindness.

Eliot seems to think, quite rightly, that what makes people living is their beliefs. But to him it seems im-



possible to accept any belief that is not a religious belief one either rejects all belief, as I A Richards finds he has done in *The Waste Land*, or else one accepts a religious belief in salvation and damnation Those who do not accept this belief are not even damned, but eternally dead For that reason, the people about whom he writes in his poems are dead, because they are not allowed to hold with any conviction the small private beliefs which are as many as people's separate occupations There is a whole list of such beliefs in St J Perse's *Anabase*, a poem which Eliot himself has translated 'He who sees his soul reflected in a blade, the man learned in sciences, in anamastic, the well thought of in councils, he who names fountains,' etc These are the living, yet they seem to be shut out of Eliot's poetry, because 'to see his soul reflected in a blade' puts a man outside the pale even of the damned

In front of *Sweeney Agonistes* there is a quotation from St John of the Cross 'Hence the soul cannot be possessed of the divine union, until it has divested itself of the love of created beings' This is coupled with a quotation from the *Choephore* of Æschylus, where Orestes says, speaking of the Furies, 'You don't see them, you don't—but I see them they are hunting me down, I must move on'

These two fragments give a final picture of the haunted world of Eliot's early poetry, and of *The Waste Land* The characters, the prostitutes and their American pals, are the dead Their lives are automatic, their only emotions are fear, and a primitive kind of superstition, which occupies them with dealing and cutting packs of cards The interruption of the telephone with its repeated 'Ting a ling ling' does not break the jazz rhythm of their talk.

Here Eliot's verse is bare of its beautiful effects, and of all poetry. It is intricate, dramatic and ingenious. Only in its organization is it superior to the thing it parodies. Eventually, in the poetry of disillusion, the parody becomes the thing parodied, in the same way as in Auden's *Dance of Death* the jazz songs are exactly like real jazz songs by Noel Coward. The parody no longer exists in the words, but in the dramatic presentation of the characters who speak the words.

Here, in Sweeney's lines, the poeticism is deliberately a falsified poetry

'Nothing to eat but the fruit as it grows  
 Nothing to see but the palm-trees one way  
 And the sea the other way,  
 Nothing to hear but the sound of the surf  
 Nothing at all but three things '

The verse only rises to poetry in the next lines

'DORIS	What things?
SWEENEY	Birth, and copulation, and death
	That's all, that's all, that's all, that's all,
	Birth, and copulation, and death
DORIS	I'd be bored
SWEENEY	You'd be bored
	Birth and copulation and death '

Here the poetry rises to a kind of fierce, destructive emphasis, the expression of a mechanism which is destroying itself.

The mood of *The Waste Land* could not go further than in this poem, for here the bareness and dryness is such that poetry would be poetically false. It is a kind of

*reductio ad absurdum* We have reached a stage when poetry refuses to be poetry.

In the spirit of the terrible quotation from St John of the Cross, all the possibilities of a human poetry are exhausted. With the exception of Sweeney, haunted by the Furies, the characters in these two fragments are non-human, they are bones.

In *Ash Wednesday*, even this ghostly human element has disappeared. The poet has now escaped from Dusty, Horsfall, Klipstein, Swarts, and Doris. His isolated journey has taken him from the drawing-rooms frequented by Prufrock, through the Waste Land, and past the Furies, into a kind of Paradise. The new environment is as literary as were the old ones, in fact it owes much to Dante, as has been pointed out. But there is another influence, of perhaps even greater significance, and that is the late Beethoven.

The music of Beethoven's last Quartets, Opera 130, 131, 132 and 135, and the Grosse Fugue, are the supreme artistic creations of a spirit in isolation, 'divested of the love of created beings', although with Beethoven the 'divesting' was an accident of his extreme misanthropy, his illogical love for his nephew, his deafness, his genius. It was not a deliberate achievement.

The life-work of Beethoven is in itself a whole epoch of musical history. If we were to compare any part of English literature with the work of Beethoven, we would have to suppose that, included under one writer's name, was, in an early period, the work of the Elizabethans, in a later period, the disillusion of such poetry as *The Waste Land*. The development of Beethoven is even more astonishing than that of Shakespeare, although it is not so wide and human. His music, at first dependent on Mozart, advanced so far and so dynamically in

directions quite unprecedented in music, that it is as though he invented a whole tradition of his own, because he practically disregarded the tradition of Bach's greatest achievements. Not only did he construct the architecture of a tradition that supported the great Symphonies, but, in his own work, he wore out that tradition. His last work is like a voice amongst the ruins of his own music. These quartets, these last sonatas, have none of the objectivity, the symmetry and structure of the works of the middle period. They are simply the expression of a unique personality, one man's isolated experience in a world that seems almost beyond pleasure and pain, and that can only be heard, it cannot in any way be described. The architectural technique that formerly, like the Spenserian stanza, stood outside of, although as part of, the music, yet always existing in its own right, has now been destroyed, and the technical device has become unified with the expression, rising and falling with it, to record this man's experience, 'divested of the love of created beings'.

Certain of these effects in the late Beethoven Quartets remind me so much of *Ash Wednesday* that it is perhaps worth while to record them. For example, in the second section of the poem, there is a sudden break in the metre from a very long line to a very short one: the very short line is maintained for twenty-two verses, and then there follows another passage of seven verses in the first metre.

' . The Lady is withdrawn

In a white gown, to contemplation, in a white gown  
 Let the whiteness of bones atone to forgetfulness.  
 There is no life in them As I am forgotten  
 And would be forgotten, so I would forget

Thus devoted, concentrated in purpose And God  
said

Prophecy to the wind, to the wind only for only  
The wind will listen And the bones sang chirping  
With the burden of the grasshopper, saying

Lady of silences  
Calm and distressed  
Torn and most whole  
Rose of memory  
Rose of forgetfulness  
Exhausted and life-giving  
Worried reposeful  
The single Rose  
Is now the Garden  
Where all loves end  
Terminate torment  
Of love unsatisfied  
The greater torment  
Of love satisfied

The Second Movement of Beethoven's Quartet, Opus 130 in A Minor, shows an effect which is echoed in these lines. The long-drawn-out notes of the opening bars are followed by a sustained, very light, very quick, almost shrill passage, this passage closes, and the music reverts to the first clear and solemn harmony.

J W. N. Sullivan has said in his book on Beethoven that the peculiarity of these late Quartets is often in their extraordinary conjunctions of mood. One can only describe the mood sometimes (for example, in the presto of the Quartet in B Flat Major) as one of gay melancholy, the Cavatina of the same Quartet is in a mood of rapt sadness.

I am reminded of these effects several times in Eliot's poem. For example, in such lines as.

'And beyond the hawthorn blossom and a pasture scene  
The broad-backed figure drest in blue and green  
Enchanted the maytime with an antique flute '

I turn now to Eliot's critical essays.

## T. S. ELIOT IN HIS CRITICISM

In *After Strange Gods* Eliot alludes to the apparent discrepancy which critics have found between his poetry and his critical prose. 'It would appear that while I maintain the most correct opinions in my criticism, I do nothing but violate them in my verse; and thus appear in a double, if not a double-faced rôle.'

This, and the alternative view that his poetry is to be admired and his prose lamented, are usual opinions. The assumption always is that his verse and prose are unrelated to each other.

Actually, they are very closely related. If one through the whole of the prose and the whole of the one finds that the same process, the same search, Tradition and for orthodox principles, combined with a same sensitivity to contemporary life, is developed through both of them. In the essays there are frequent references (they grow more open as time goes on) to problems in which the writer himself is involved in his creative work. A certain light relief is provided, if the reader is curious enough to wonder whether there be any connexion between the following two passages. The first is a discussion of the way in which a poet may select his imagery.<sup>1</sup>

'And this selection probably runs through the whole of his sensitive life. There might be the experience of a child of ten, a small boy peering through sea-water in a

<sup>1</sup> *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, p. 78.

rock-pool, and finding a sea-anemone for the first time the simple experience (not so simple, for an exceptional child, as it looks) might be dormant in his mind for twenty years, and reappear transformed in some verse-context charged with great imaginative pressure'

The second is from the *Rhapsody on a Windy Night*

'I could see nothing behind that child's eye  
I have seen eyes in the street  
Trying to peer through lighted shutters,  
And a crab one afternoon in a pool,  
An old crab with barnacles on his back,  
Gripped the end of a stick which I held him'

in its relation to the philosophy which forms the ground of his poetry, some of the criticism is most nating Particularly the essays on Baudelaire and , for Dante is the poet whose writing and attitude most of the conditions which Eliot, in his last ,s, has come to impose on the artist He is Christian, ral, orthodox and traditional Without Dante, as the upreme example of an orthodox writer, *After Strange Gods* could hardly have been written Baudelaire, on the other hand, provides the machinery of the modern Inferno and he is also to Eliot an example of the Christian writer The Introduction to Baudelaire's *Intimate Journal*<sup>1</sup> shows how, unless Baudelaire had decided to be damned, it would have been more difficult for Eliot to set out on the path of salvation Lastly, there are the critical writings of T. E. Hulme The paragraph which Eliot quotes at the end of this same Introduction needs no comment

'In the light of these absolute values, man himself is

<sup>1</sup> This essay is now published in the volume of *Selected Essays*



judged to be essentially limited and imperfect. He is endowed with Original Sin. While he can occasionally accomplish acts which partake of perfection, he can never himself be perfect. Certain secondary results in regard to ordinary human action in society follow from this. A man is essentially bad, he can only accomplish anything of value by discipline—ethical and political. Order is thus not merely negative, but creative and liberating. Institutions are necessary.'

Thus in Dante, Baudelaire, T. E. Hulme, Ezra Pound, the Elizabethans, and a half-dozen other influences one sees the background of Eliot's poetry in Eliot's prose. The poetry and the prose together form a whole: the poetry is strengthened and given its ideals by the prose, the prose is illustrated and given foundation by the poetry. Perhaps this explains a puzzling sentence in *After Strange Gods*. 'I should say that in one's prose reflexions one may be legitimately occupied with ideals whereas in the writing of verse one can only deal with actuality.'

His prose is not confined to criticism, and perhaps some of the most important parts of his criticism occur in his poetry. For his poetry is literary and full of quotation, and his use of the passages which he quotes implies a critical attitude. We look in the essays for criticism of the Elizabethans which concerns their ideals, in *Gerontion* and *The Waste Land* for the criticism which emphasizes their historic actuality.

The pervading weakness of Eliot's writing is a certain fragmentariness: 'These fragments I have shored against my ruins,' in *The Waste Land*, and.

'Because I cannot hope to turn again  
Consequently I rejoice, having to construct something  
Upon which to rejoice,'

from *Ash Wednesday*, are lines which, without any weakness, yet 'give him away,' because they are so true. In his poetry he is an inhibited writer, exploiting in himself a tendency in his own work to break off just when the reader is expecting him to become most lucid, and making of this tendency a technical device. His prose, in spite of its logical precision, its dryness, and its fine organization, is, in its context, uneven: occasionally there are remarks of brilliant observation, of violent prejudice, or whole paragraphs of sententiousness.

The poetry and the prose to some extent bolster each other up, and are interdependent. The thought that has led the poetry on from stage to stage has been developed in the prose. The prose itself, though, has weakness: for Eliot is not very good at argument or at abstract discussion, and it is the poetry that illuminates and justifies his ideas. Without his poetry, the religious and social opinions in his last two critical works would seem ineffective, and perhaps unimportant.

Both poetry and prose combine to produce the impression of an extraordinarily conscientious writer, who is prepared to work out all the ideas which form the background of his poetry, and risk applying this 'ideology' to Church, politics and social life. He and Yeats are the first English poets of this century who seem to have realized that if the beliefs which govern a poet when he is writing, are hopelessly removed from the beliefs on which contemporary society and the law are based, then his poetry will seem remote from the life around him. The poet is driven either into an attitude of eccentric and defiant individualism, or else he must try and work out his ideas and relate them to society. Eliot has therefore explained his position very carefully, and any criticism of that position is relevant to his poetry.

Unfortunately, though, his explanations are not quite simple. His conscience seems to have driven him to work out every step in his development, but it has not enabled him to overcome a certain ambiguity. To take a very obvious example, it is difficult for a writer who hates an age of usefulness, of birth-control, hygiene, and business, to recommend efficient institutions and forms of behaviour when he recommends the advice on Birth Control of the Lambeth Conference, or that the censorship should be directed from Lambeth Palace, one has to remember that such remedies may appeal to him simply because he is reacting from an utilitarian age.

The very first essay in *The Sacred Wood*, on Tradition and The Individual Talent, might lead one to think that Eliot was to live contentedly among the apostles of 'art for art's sake,' brought up to date by Bloomsbury, and called 'significant form.' For he offers a neat formula to illustrate the creation of poetry: 'Consider, as a suggestive analogy, the action which takes place when a bit of finely filiated platinum is introduced into a chamber containing oxygen and sulphur dioxide.'

Michael Roberts has shown that what we are led to suppose happens in this experiment does not really happen at all. T S Eliot also darkly hints in a later passage that there is 'at least one doubtful analogy' in this essay but nevertheless, if one has faith, in the mind's eye such scientific experiments come off. 'When the two gases previously mentioned are mixed in the presence of a filament of platinum, they form sulphurous acid. The mind of the poet is the shred of platinum. It may partly or exclusively operate upon the experience of the man himself, but the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates, the more perfectly will

the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material.'

The essay is in fact a vigorous attack on critics who maintain that poetry is the expression of personality, and at the same time it is a defence of tradition. Although the essay is convincingly argued there is a certain doubt left as to its intention.

Firstly, it is rather difficult to understand why Eliot is so much on the defensive about tradition. For, if he is on the defensive, if his purpose is, like Henry James's, to hold up a Continental example to the English, he over-proves his case. Because he proves that, without tradition as an element in the chemical formula, poetry cannot exist. Therefore tradition is a *sine qua non*, and it is difficult to see how some poetry can be 'more traditional' than other poetry, except in the sense that it is better or worse, which is, in fact, the sense in which Eliot uses the word traditional. But he does not seem quite happy at letting the reader know he is doing this.

Now, if good poetry is more traditional than bad poetry, the use of the word traditional immediately becomes very dubious, because many of the best poets are obviously not learned. This so worries Eliot that he immediately adopts the tone, on the one hand mystifying, on the other hand almost sneering, which is typical of him in moments when he is least certain of himself. The reader is sneered at for thinking that tradition is something which a really great poet, like Shakespeare, has to acquire. In case he should dispute this, he is then heavily snubbed by a remark to the effect that less great poets have to work hard to gain a sense of the traditional. 'Tradition cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable

to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year' Don't dare to dispute this, he might have added, unless your name is Shakespeare

This happens to be very true, but the fact remains that Eliot has altered his position. He is not, like Henry James, making a criticism of the whole of English literature, although he leaves plenty of room for one to think that perhaps he is doing so. What he is really saying is simply that bad poetry is not traditional, and that good poetry is traditional. Further, since he admits that there is no way by which one can examine a poet and discover him to be untraditional, 'untraditional' becomes simply a term of abuse which one reserves for generally accepted poetry which one doesn't happen to like, such as Shelley. It seems rather an elaborate way of bolstering up one's dislikes.

Later on we are told 'The point of view which I am struggling to attach is perhaps related to the metaphysical theory of the substantial unity of the soul for the meaning is that the poet has, not a 'personality' to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways'

This is very striking, and it seems to answer satisfactorily the point of view which Eliot opposes, because it refutes altogether the conception of an expressed personality, and reduces it to meaninglessness. Yet two pages further on he says 'Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion, it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality'<sup>1</sup>

But an escape from personality, which is an escape from emotion, is an expression of personality. It is evident that Eliot is saying in other words what a great

<sup>1</sup> *Selected Essays*, p. 20

many people mean when they speak of an 'expression of personality'—a fairly impersonal state of mind in which one is able to regard the emotions of one's personality objectively—but this is only a degree of introspection.

A significant aspect of this essay is the omission of all discussion of the part played by either nature or the objective world in poetry. Eliot's view of æsthetic creation seems to be purely cerebral—the outer world of reality is viewed either as digested experience, or else as 'impressions'—impressions that only seem important for what they impress on the mind, without regard for the reality which is doing the impressing. We may well wonder how this formula suits Whitman, or the D. H. Lawrence of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*. It certainly does not fit Lawrence's poetry at all, and Whitman only after a straining which renders the meaning of the word 'traditional' very vague. The fact is that Eliot has quite ignored the kind of artist whose creativeness is stimulated by a perpetual tension between the objective world, the world of nature, and his own inner world—and this consciousness of the world outside is the only real impersonality. To Eliot, as to most modern writers, nature, except in the sense of Georgian nature poetry, does not seem to exist. When one notices this, one also begins to understand certain of Eliot's dislikes. His dislike of Lawrence seems inevitable, but his dislike even of Goethe becomes a little clearer when one considers how unsympathetic to the cerebral writer must be such lines as the following from *Faust*.

'Vom Eise befreit sind Strom und Bäche  
Durch des Frühlings holden, belebenden Blick,  
Im Thale grünet Hoffnungs-Glück,

Der alte Winter, in seiner Schwäche,  
 Zog sich in rauhe Berge zurück  
 Von dorthier sendet er fliehend nur  
 Ohnmachtige Schauer körnigen Eises  
 In Streifen über die grunende Flur,  
 Aber die Sonne duldet kein Weisses,  
 Überall regt sich Bildung und Streben,  
 Alles will sie mit Farben beleben,  
 Doch an Blumen fehlt's im Revier,  
 Sie nimmt geputzte Menschen dafür '

In Eliot's essay there seems to be little feeling that a sense of tradition can be derived from the conditions of life round the poet, that his audience, or his potential audience, is, as it were, the carrier of tradition, and that he is the one infected. Nor is there, as yet, any feeling that tradition may be found in the Church, or, as we find it in Henry James, amongst an aristocracy. It is to be found in books.

In later essays, he endeavours always to trace the line of tradition in literature, and this, of course, leads him eventually away from books, to the contemporary social environment of the writers whom he is discussing, to morals, and, lastly, to theology. A more critical and less analytic attitude to English literature is adopted. One of his exponents in the *Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry* even hints at the possibility that Shakespeare is not traditional enough, because of his lack of an ordered social background. 'Restoration Comedy is a comedy of social manners. It presupposes the existence of a society, therefore of social and moral laws. It laughs at the members of society who transgress its laws. The tragedy of Shakespeare goes much deeper and yet it tells us only that weakness of character leads to disaster. There is no such background of social order such as you perceive

behind Corneille and Sophocles' Then, again 'So far as I can isolate Shakespeare, I prefer him to all other dramatists of every time But I cannot do that altogether, and I find the age of Shakespeare moved in a steady current, with back-eddies certainly, towards anarchy and chaos'<sup>1</sup> And lastly 'You can never draw the line between æsthetic criticism and moral and social criticism, you cannot draw a line between criticism and metaphysics, you start with literary criticism, and however rigorous an æsthete you may be, you are over the frontier into something else sooner or later'<sup>2</sup> After this, it is clear that Eliot himself is over the frontier it becomes a question of the sense in which he is a moralist and a metaphysician

The best and most renowned of Eliot's essays are those on the Elizabethans It is when we come to the essay on Blake that we notice suddenly the sharp division of his opinion For whilst we are told that Blake benefited from his lack of systematic education, and that *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* is 'naked philosophy, presented,' we are told later that 'we have the same respect for Blake's philosophy (and perhaps for that of Samuel Butler) that we have for an ingenious piece of home-made furniture we admire the man who has put it together out of the odds and ends about the house' Now Samuel Butler is certainly not 'naked philosophy, presented,' and his conjunction with Blake is absurd. it is a tentative effort to disparage Blake, to 'take him down a peg,' and the reason for Eliot's annoyance soon becomes clear, when he adds censoriously. 'We are not really so remote from the Continent, or from our own past, as to be deprived of the advantages of culture, if we wish them' He ignores the fact that Blake had excellent reasons for not 'wishing them'

<sup>1</sup> *Selected Essays*, p 53

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid* 55



The remark that Blake's philosophy resembles a piece of home-made furniture is ingenious and unjust, nor does it explain why he was not as great an artist as Beethoven, for instance, whose philosophy was also 'home-made'. As so often happens with Eliot, he seems to diagnose with great acuteness, and then is anxious to suggest some cure but the cure has no relation to the illness. He goes on to say 'Blake was endowed with a capacity for considerable understanding of human nature, with a remarkable and original sense of language and the music of language, and a gift of hallucinated vision. Had these been controlled by a respect for impersonal vision, for common sense, for the objectivity of science, it would have been better for him'. That is the suggested cure. It is more than a cure, in fact, it is a panacea. Blake, Shelley, Goethe, D. H. Lawrence, all of them lacked that little something which Eliot expresses in different ways, but which in the servants' hall would be described as 'knowing one's place'.

The fault with Blake is that he is 'up to twenty, decidedly a traditional'. But after twenty things started to go wrong. Here we encounter the oddest and most personal note in Eliot's criticism. This is a note of almost personal irritation with the writers whom he is criticizing, so strongly does he feel that they oughtn't to be doing something which they do, but something quite different. The great Victorians oughtn't (as we all know) to have written so much. Goethe oughtn't to have written poetry at all. 'his true role was that of the man of the world and sage—a La Rochefoucauld, a La Bruyère, a Vauvenargues'.<sup>1</sup> One feels that he is never quite satisfied with any English writer, except some of the metaphysical poets, and Pope and Dryden. The others never quite

<sup>1</sup> *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, p. 99

obey all the rules, and, of course, they are never nearly 'traditional' enough

The search for principles, the perpetual sacrifice of what he calls personality, and the study of tradition, led Eliot to the conclusion that one could make no æsthetic judgment which did not imply a moral judgment and this same path was one perhaps of many that led him finally to theology

His conclusions attempt to refute the charge that they are themselves home-made, or that they are individualistic, by being rigidly orthodox, and they attempt also to be practical. That is to say they broaden into a social philosophy, and in his more recent criticism he has applied that philosophy to questions outside literary criticism

It is these practical conclusions that form the test of his traditionalism for it is evident that no tradition is wholly valid that is not rooted in contemporary life as much as in the life of the past. In one of his recently published American lectures, Eliot very rightly disputes the commonly held view that Wordsworth's opinions are unimportant and unrelated to his poetry. 'I am not sure that this critical eclecticism cannot go too far. that we can judge and enjoy a man's poetry while leaving wholly out of account all of the things for which he cared deeply, and on behalf of which he turned his poetry to account'<sup>1</sup>

Eliot's own opinions are not merely related to his poetry. They qualify his whole critical attitude, and they make him to some extent a preacher. His aim as a writer has been to be a traditionalist. the tradition which he has adopted, being derived from the Church, has also sociological and educative implications. It is his object to show that the application of these principles in social

<sup>1</sup> *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, p. 81

life is as just as it is correct to apply them to literature. He seems to feel that unless he can prove this, he is, in his work, an individualist not a traditionalist radically connected with the historic process but isolated, original, personal, in the sense that he is writing about his own beliefs which are 'home-made,' and so make him eccentric, and different from the people around him.

Whereas the Marxist tries to accomplish the same sacrifice of individualist traits in order to achieve the fulfilment of a more united and wider humanity, by an historic act of the will which makes him reach forward and forcibly impose on the present the visualized, completed social system of the future, Eliot looks to the Church, and finds it the single enduring building which survives in the chaos of our civilization. If it is not as powerful in a worldly sense as it was, that is only regrettable in the view of those who are concerned for civilization in this world for its teachings and its sacraments survive, and their real emphasis lies not on life but on death. moreover, it does offer the only surviving hope for our civilization. 'The world is trying the experiment of attempting to form a civilized but non-Christian mentality. The experiment will fail; but we must be very patient in awaiting its collapse, meanwhile redeeming the time. so that the Faith may be preserved alive through the dark ages before us, to renew and rebuild civilization, and save the World from suicide.'<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes, however, he seems to despair of civilization. 'Perhaps he (Matthew Arnold) cared too much for civilization, forgetting that Heaven and Earth shall pass away, and Mr Arnold with them, and there is only one stay.'<sup>2</sup> So that he is not so sure about civilization, after all

<sup>1</sup> *Selected Essays*, p. 363

<sup>2</sup> *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, p. 119

This is a doctrine of Death. The implication is that probably civilization is at an end, but there is still the Church. The Church, though, is a ruin, and is probably incapable of saving the world even if the world wants to be saved, and Mr. Arnold is reproached for seeming to want salvation on earth, the strength of the Church lies in the fact that it has another life to offer.

Meanwhile, there are certain remedies and palliatives that Eliot shows. For example, that married couples should take the advice of priests as to the exercise of Birth Control. 'Here, if anywhere, is definitely a matter upon which the Individual Conscience is no reliable guide, spiritual guidance should be imperative, and it should be clearly placed above medical advice—where also, opinions and theories vary indefinitely.'<sup>1</sup> As though the uncertainty of medicine were a motive for putting the matter in the care of those who may know nothing whatever about it. He proposes that the censorship, if it exist at all, should be at Lambeth Palace. A certain vindictive Puritanism is revealed in these lines: 'Thought, study, mortification, sacrifice—it is such notions as these that should be impressed upon the young.'<sup>2</sup>

It is for such opinions that Eliot will be judged by those who read his prose, and who, perhaps seeking guides, live in the belief that there is only one thing now which is worth doing, and that is to create a new and better civilization.

In *After Strange Gods*, Eliot has restated his traditional faith, extending it considerably beyond the world of literature. 'What I mean by tradition involves all those habitual actions, habits and customs, from the most significant religious rite to our conventional way of

<sup>1</sup> *Selected Essays*, p. 351

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid* p. 349

greeting a stranger, which represent the blood kinship of the 'same people living in the same place' Certain conclusions are drawn from this 'The population should be homogeneous, where two or more cultures exist in the same place they are likely either to become fiercely self-conscious or both to become adulterate What is still more important is unity of religious background, and reasons of race and religion combine to make any large number of free-thinking Jews undesirable There must be a proper balance between urban and rural, industrial and agricultural development And a spirit of excessive tolerance is to be deprecated'<sup>1</sup>

So much for Internationalism It is hardly necessary to point out that although Eliot is not a fascist, there is no sentence in this paragraph with which Mussolini, Hitler, and Mosley would not thoroughly agree They would probably tolerate even the mild amount of ragging they get in *The Rock* from such an ally, just as they are prepared to tolerate a certain amount from the Church The doctrine is not Catholic or Protestant It has no echo in Renaissance Italy or in the teachings of the Church which claimed to stand above all cultures and local characteristics, and to unite all peoples Nor does it apply to our own history since the Reformation It is in fact an Old Testament doctrine suited to the intense nationalism and racial self-sufficiency of the Chosen People There is nothing in the New Testament to correspond to it

In order to illustrate the necessity of a tradition, and of orthodoxy, he picks out, in *After Strange Gods*, more or less at random, three short stories by modern writers The stories are *Bliss* by Katherine Mansfield, *The Shadow in the Rose Garden* by D H Lawrence, and *The Dead*

<sup>1</sup> *After Strange Gods*, p 20

by James Joyce. The choice is fortunate, in that all the stories concern the same subject, the disillusionment, in the case of the story by Katherine Mansfield, of a wife in her relations with her husband, and, in the case of the two men writers, of a husband with his wife. It is rather less fortunate that the stories are of very unequal merit, especially as Joyce's story is the best of his first period, and the story by Lawrence is one of his weakest.

Eliot then proceeds to give Katherine Mansfield's story highest marks. 'Our satisfaction recognizes the skill with which the author has handled perfectly the *minimum* material—it is what I believe would be called feminine.' However, 'We are given neither comment nor suggestion of any moral issue of good and evil, and within the setting this is quite right.' This seems to me self-contradictory. I suppose it has the object of criticizing the story because it is not moral, and thus relating it to the other two stories, and at the same time acquitting Eliot of having made this criticism because it is admitted that 'within the setting this is quite right.'

So that Katherine Mansfield is really out of the running in this competition. The real conflict is between Lawrence and Joyce. Eliot objects to Lawrence's story, because of a strain of wilful cruelty in it. Here is his version of the story.

'An accident, trifling in itself, but important in the twist which Lawrence gives to it, leads or forces the wife to reveal to her commonplace lower-middle-class lover (no writer is more conscious of class-distinctions than Lawrence) the facts of her intrigue with an army officer several years before their marriage. The disclosure is made with something approaching conscious cruelty. There is cruelty, too, in the circumstances in which she has met her former lover.

'And I saw him to-day,' she said 'He is not dead, he's mad' Her husband looked at her, startled 'Mad!' he said involuntarily 'A lunatic,' she said

Eliot comments 'What I wish chiefly to notice at this point, is what strikes me in all the relations of Lawrence's men and women the absence of any moral or social sense'<sup>1</sup>

Now to say that Lawrence's men and women have no moral and social sense is simply untrue The object of the present story is to show that the wife, having been in love with the soldier who became a lunatic, was in a false relationship to her husband. Lawrence's belief is that false and artificial relationships must be destroyed. and that if they are destroyed, an enduring tender and human relationship may spring up Eliot does not mention in his account of this story that the real shadow in the rose garden is the war. The war with its blind and destructive cruelty is the presence in their minds which has made their marriage false. if they are to be rid of the falsity, they are obliged not to evade it Eliot does not so much as refer to the last paragraph in the story, which explains what is the new relationship between the husband and the wife.

'He stood and looked at her. At last he had learned the width of the breach between them She still squatted on the bed It would be a violation to each of them to be brought into contact with each other The thing must work itself out. They were both shocked so much, they were impersonal, and no longer hated each other. After some minutes he left her and went out.'

I fail to see the conscious cruelty in this conclusion. However, in the volume of stories called *Dubliners* by James Joyce, from which Eliot has singled out *The*

<sup>1</sup> *After Strange Gods*, p 36

*Dead* as a model of orthodoxy, there is one called *The Encounter* which seems to have been written from no inspiration except cruelty. It relates how two boys take a day off from school in order to search for adventures; it describes a few of the incidents of their day, and then how, as they are resting in a field, a man approaches them and enters into a conversation. 'The man continued his monologue. He seemed to have forgotten his recent liberalism. He said that if ever he found a boy talking to girls or having a girl for a sweetheart he would whip him and whip him, and that would teach him not to be talking to girls. And if a boy had a girl for a sweetheart and told lies about it, then he would give him a whipping such as no boy ever got in this world. He said there was nothing in this world he would like so well as that. He described to me how he would whip such a boy, as if he were unfolding some elaborate mystery.' I only mention this story to show that the attacks on Thomas Hardy and Lawrence for morbidity can hardly be maintained, in order to uphold the consistent kindheartedness of Joyce. Joyce is certainly a moral writer, but so are Lawrence and Hardy: all three writers have it in common that they are sometimes interested in describing pure sensations, accidents in life which seem to have no moral associations.

*The Dead* is a beautiful and tender work, fully deserving the praise which Eliot gives to it. I again quote his summary, because it is better than any I could write myself.

'In Mr Joyce's story the wife is saddened by memories associated with a song sung at an evening party which has just been described in minute detail. In response to solicitous questions by her husband, she reveals the fact that the song had been sung by a boy she



knew in Galway when she was a girl, and that between them was an intense romantic and spiritualized love. She had had to go away; the boy had risen from a sickbed to come to say good-bye to her, and he had in consequence died. That is all there was to it, but the husband realizes that what this boy had given her was something finer than anything he had ever to give. And as the wife falls asleep at last

'Generous tears filled Gabriel's eyes. He had never felt like that himself towards any woman, but he knew that such a feeling must be love. The tears gathered more thickly in his eyes and in the partial darkness he imagined he saw the form of a young man standing under a dripping tree. Other forms were near. His soul had approached that region where dwell the vast hosts of the dead.'

Eliot comments 'We are not concerned with the author's *beliefs*, but with orthodoxy of sensibility and with the sense of tradition, our degree of approaching the "region where dwell the vast hosts of the dead"'. And Lawrence is, for my purposes, an almost perfect example of the heretic. And the most ethically orthodox of the more eminent writers of my time is Mr Joyce. I confess that I do not know what to make of a generation which ignores these considerations.<sup>1</sup>

The traditionalism of this very beautiful story seems for Eliot to consist mainly in the fact that it is about the dead. Yet this is a confusion, because no subject could be less in the specifically English tradition than this story. The plot is sentimental, for the concession which Gabriel makes—that the love of this boy, because he died and because it was spiritualized, is hopelessly superior to the love of the man who lived—is false. The preoccupation

<sup>1</sup> *After Strange Gods*, p. 37

with death which distinguishes the story and alters its values, so that, in spite of the situation, the treatment is not sentimental, is Catholic and Irish. It is therefore curious that Eliot goes on to explain the decay of modern English literature in terms of the decay of Protestantism. The only really traditional writer he has found is not a Protestant but a Catholic. Lawrence is taken, I suppose, as the chief example of Protestantism in decay. I may note, in parenthesis, that all these arguments are heralded by announcements that 'we are not concerned with the author's beliefs,' that his thesis does not lead to a 'theological conclusion,' which are particularly confusing. Poor Mrs. Lawrence gets a great deal of blame 'the vague hymn-singing pietism which seems to have consoled the miseries of Lawrence's mother, and which does not seem to have provided her with any firm principles by which to scrutinize the conduct of her son.' Whether, if Mrs. Lawrence had gone to the spikiest church in Eastwood, Nottingham, Eliot would have found more to approve of in the books of her son, one may doubt. I suspect that his dislike of Mrs. Lawrence is fundamentally the same as his objection to Goethe, Shelley, and the rest, her son did not know his place.

The difficulty is that Eliot's victory for Joyce over Lawrence is too facile. We are told that Joyce is a traditionalist, and we agree that he is the very conscious follower of a Latin-European tradition, and that his true predecessor in English was Henry James. *The Altar of the Dead* has all the virtues which Eliot admires in Joyce's story, *The Dead*.

To call Joyce a traditionalist means a lot, but to call Lawrence a heretic means nothing. For if the tradition is all that matters, it finally disposes of Lawrence as a serious writer. On the other hand, if Lawrence does matter,

then we have got to revise our use of the word tradition, and the machine that Eliot has constructed falls to pieces. We remember his curious remark that Blake was only traditional 'up to the age of twenty'. After that he became not a classic—like Dante—but 'only a poet of genius'. Perhaps a part of the English tradition is to produce artists who are only poets of genius.

When it comes to deploring D H Lawrence's religious upbringing, to finding that Joyce's work is 'penetrated with Christian feeling,' that Yeats's supernatural world is 'the wrong supernatural world,' and finding that in the case of Gerard Manley Hopkins 'to be converted is not going to do for a man, as a writer, what his ancestry and country for some generations have failed to do',<sup>1</sup> then the questions of belief, race, and education are bound to arise. For the virtue of Joyce seems to be in his Jesuit upbringing, from which, in all his writings, he has so publicly revolted. Eliot is introducing a new standard of snobbery into English criticism if, when we compare the merits of Lawrence, Joyce, and Hopkins, we have to consider where each was educated, and what was the Aryan faith of his parents. This is, I suppose, all a part of the 'struggle, in a word, against Liberalism'. A struggle which, in what Eliot calls 'the major intellectual centres of Europe,' has already met with such striking success that for a traditionalist to continue it in England seems almost like flogging a dead horse.

So if we do not wish to simplify our judgments of Eliot by simply labelling him a reactionary, we must turn to the question of his belief. It is clear that he requires orthodoxy of writers in a Christian sense. 'I suggest that with the disappearance of the idea of Original Sin, with the disappearance of the idea of intense

<sup>1</sup> *After Strange Gods*, p. 47

moral struggle, the human beings presented to us both in poetry and prose fiction to-day, and more patently among the serious writers than in the underworld of letters, tend to become less and less real'

We may accept this as a definite conclusion. Then challenge it with the question. Are the Russian Liberal novelists, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Turgenev, notorious for having created less and less real characters? It seems to me that there can only be one answer to this question. And this answer leads to the conclusion that Eliot's orthodoxy has led his criticism very far astray.

Eliot's traditionalism provides us with no critical standards which we can apply to writers who are not orthodox Christians, in the sense in which he understands the word Christianity.

In order to illustrate the decline of modern moral and religious standards, he ends his book with some examples of heresy. He missed one which comes out of classic America and which is flagrantly perfect. It is from *Moby Dick*. 'I was a good Christian, born and bred in the bosom of the infallible Presbyterian Church. How, then, could I unite with this wild idolator in worshipping his piece of wood? but what is worship? thought I. Do you suppose now, Ishmael, that the magnanimous God of heaven and earth—pagans and all included—can possibly be jealous of an insignificant bit of black wood? Impossible! But what is worship?—to do the will of God?—*that* is worship. And what is the will of God?—to do to my fellow-man what I would have my fellow-man do to me—*that* is the will of God. Now, Queequeg is my fellow-man. And what do I wish that this Queequeg would do to me? Why, unite with me in my particular Presbyterian form of worship. Consequently, I must then unite with him in his, ergo, I must turn idolator.

So I kindled the shavings, helped prop up the innocent little idol, offered him burnt biscuit with Queequeg, salaamed before him twice or thrice, kissed his nose, and that done, we undressed and went to bed, at peace with our own consciences and all the world But we did not go to sleep without some little chat '

## IX

### NOTES ON D H LAWRENCE

THERE IS some truth in Wyndham Lewis's criticism of D. H. Lawrence that 'In his devotion to that romantic abdominal *Within* he abandoned the sunlit pagan surface of the earth'<sup>1</sup>

This needs qualifying, for Lawrence at no stage abandoned 'the sunlit pagan surface', his last work, *The Man Who Died*, is as full of it as anything he wrote, but it is quite true that his greatness as a writer lies in his choice of the external world as a subject, and that he was less consistent in his account of the inner life. That is to say, the real consistency of everything he wrote, every poem, novel, or essay, lies in his description of the 'surface of the world' as sunlit, and as independent of the observer, and as intrinsically living as a landscape of Van Gogh. A page of description from *The White Peacock*, one of the poems from *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, the description of the porcupine in *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine*, a page from *The Virgin and the Gipsy*, all have this same pervasion of strength and brilliance. Take a few lines from *The Snake*.

'He lifted his head from his drinking as cattle do,  
And looked at me vaguely, as drinking cattle do,  
And flickered his two-forked tongue from his lips,  
and mused a moment,  
And stopped and drank a little more,

<sup>1</sup> *Men without Art*, p. 121

Being earth-brown, earth-golden from the burning  
bowels of the earth

On the day of the Sicilian July, with Etna smoking.'

This is so vivid that one feels almost that Lawrence is the snake, but without the snake being in the least Lawrence

It is quite true that when the word 'dark' occurs, these poems seem to lose their hardness we seem on the verge of some confusion, some immensity of nausea. What Lawrence is trying to convey is a sensation and he is never content to indicate it. It is not that he is unable to indicate it, for when he writes three lines about the eagle, 'inward' as they are, they take one's breath away.

'You never look at the sun with your two eyes.

Only the inner eye of your scorched broad breast  
Looks straight at the sun'

No one could mistake this for anything but an eagle or a hawk. But when he goes on in the next verse to speak about 'dark cleaving down,' and, in the verse after that, about the 'dark face-weapon,' the eagle becomes confused with the tortoise, the snake, the elephant, the peacock and the Mexican leader in *The Plumed Serpent*.

One may object to the 'abdominal within,' but, nevertheless, the fact remains that things do have insides, and that the more we know about the collective unconscious, the more probable it seems that the outer shell which mostly differentiates and individualizes life exhibits secondary, acquired characteristics, and that the primary characteristics belong to the unconscious, and are therefore collective. Lawrence was only an individualist in the sense that he wished the individual to be free in order that he might transcend his own separation from

his fellow-beings, and fulfil his deep and unconscious being through sex, and through non-individual, primary sensations.

All through his life Lawrence was preoccupied with ideas of death. But death in most of his work is an experience affecting individuals: it is the death of the mother in *Sons and Lovers*, and again of his own mother in the poems. In these books it lacks the quality of an objective sensation completely drowning the individual, in the sense that sex has that quality. Sex is, indeed, in his novels, a river in which his characters bathe and renew themselves, but at the same time a terrible river, which they fear.

Sex to Lawrence, the mysterious 'dark' world, at which Wyndham Lewis so shudders, is life, it is the very opposite of death, it has ecstasies which are 'beyond life and death,' and it is the means of escape for the individual from the living death of the modern world. He is nowhere more emphatic than in his condemnation of Whitman.

'A certain ghoulish insistency. A certain horrible pottage of human parts. A certain stridency and portentousness. A luridness about his beatitudes.'<sup>1</sup> Yet one is puzzled, because it reads remarkably like an account of his own work.

He condemns Whitman because of his all-embracing attitude to the world, because of his lack of privacy, because of his everlasting journey along an open road. Yet who had less privacy than Lawrence, all of whose novels are autobiographical, and all his affairs discussed by his former friends? Who travelled further in search of life and comradeship? And where is individuality more deeply submerged than in his world of sensations?

He points out that Walt Whitman found himself most completely—and paradoxically—in his poems about death. He quotes a poem, and comments

<sup>1</sup> *Studies in Classical American Literature* Walt Whitman, p. 162



'This is strange, from the exultant Walt

'Death!

'Death is now his chant! Death!

'Merging! And Death! Which is the final merge

'The great merge into the womb Woman

'And after that, the merge of comrades man-for-man  
love

'And almost immediately with this, death, the final  
merge of death

'There you have the progression of merging For the  
great mergers, woman at last becomes inadequate For  
those who love to extremes'<sup>1</sup>

Here again we are brought face to face with Lawrence  
himself The last paragraph might almost be his own  
epitaph The experience or experiment of man for man  
love is recorded in *Aaron's Rod*, and again in *Women in  
Love* Before this, in the earlier poems, you get 'the  
great merge into the womb Woman' Especially in  
the poems about his mother

What are we to conclude from this?

It is, perhaps, that if one attempts the merging of the  
individuality into the collective unconscious in sex, one  
must finally accept it also in death

And Lawrence did this In his *Last Poems* he accepted  
his Ship of Death, as willingly as Whitman had followed  
his open road to death before him

'Imperious Caesar, dead and turned to clay,  
Might stop a hole to keep the wind away  
O, that the earth which kept the world in awe  
Should patch a wall t'expel the winter's flaw!'

<sup>1</sup> *Studies in Classic American Literature* (p 168)

This is also the 'final merge' which we find in Whitman. But to-day the idea of physical dissolution does not suggest death very strongly to us. It has to be particularly violent (as in pictures of war corpses) even to horrify us. Our death is loss of individuality. In a mechanized age, an age of mass production, this kind of death haunts life. Yet, as Lawrence very clearly saw, the assertion of one's individuality, the insistence on one's will is not the answer of life to this modern form of death. The answer is, in fact, in a life that is deeper than individuality, that has no assertive individuality that can be taken away from it. In short, it is not death that matters, but the reality of death. The deathly aspect of our civilization is not a real death at all: it is an unreality which makes life into a ghost. Real dying is preferable to this.

The importance, then, of Lawrence as a revolutionary and a preacher, is that he insisted on real and living values: real life, real sexual experience, real death. All *ideas* of love and honour could be sacrificed to these realities. This is revolutionary, because it is clear that if human beings insist on having lives with these values, they cannot accept society as it now is.

Lawrence never felt that because he was an artist his life was cut off from the lives of the people round him. He did not even seem to feel the conflict in himself, that so many artists complain of, between the man and the artist. His written work was a by-product of his whole creativeness, like sweating. He did not feel the general creativeness in himself to be freakish or abnormal. It was simply the creative urge of life which ought to be present in everybody who was a human being and not a machine. In some people it would reveal itself in writing and painting: but it ought

to unite in everyone to produce a kind of society which was different and more creative than our own

The fact that he was continually experimenting with ideas for altering society is extremely significant. His whole life was really such an experiment, with his plans for establishing colonies in Mexico, his own travels, and even, it seems, in his relationship with his wife. His work is all a documentation of his attempts to discover a new and better relationship between the sexes, and new and better ways of living. But he himself is the subject of the experiment, not his work. In his writing he is not technically an innovator.

Lawrence's books are the extreme opposite of the type of book represented by James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Such art as *Ulysses* is an extreme form of romantic idealism. There is no doubt of its greatness as poetic achievement, but it is important to realize that *Ulysses* is at the end of the tradition which produced it. The art of Joyce is really independent of any social structure. It depends simply on the mental experience of the individual writer.

The danger with writers who are strongly individualistic is that they are creating a culture which depends only on a personal experience and personal beliefs; which has no roots in the life around it, which is not the fruit of beliefs held by many people, which is blasé, and not even rebellious. Therefore society may wake up at any moment and find that it can do without the individual creators of this art, because the art is the possession of certain people, and not the life-blood of the civilization, this has happened to the majority of the artists in Germany.

In opposition to most of the writers of his time, Lawrence was an artist on the side of the whole civilization, not just the supporter of a clique. Firstly, he recog-

nized the existence of external nature having a vivid life of its own, independent of the life of man. Secondly, his own life was deeply rooted in physical and social experiences shared by the people round him. Thirdly, he was deeply interested in what we may in the widest sense call political and moral questions. Fourthly, he was not a reactionary—he was a creative writer, not merely in the æsthetic sense, but in the sense that his writing was a constant search for a new life and a new form of life in which civilization might survive or be re-created.

He did not sacrifice his life to his art, or even, as has been suggested, his art to his life. The two functions are in his work, well balanced. Yet he is not in the least a perfect artist, and his writing has many faults, particularly, I think that until the end of his life he never seems to have had time to find the form best suited to his expression. The point is, though, that it was scarcely possible for him to discover that form—his life was bound to be a search, and to be unsettled, full of conflict and incomplete. Therefore, without falsity—not artistic falsity, but falsity to the life in his work—he could not write conclusive and perfect novels. What he was really out to write, no doubt, were books that had the weight and translucency of parables or legends, full of moral significance. A book like *Moby Dick* approximated to his ideal. At the end of his life he wrote *The Man Who Died*, which has the strength of a legend, and which is artistically better than the novels.

He was quite aware of his artistic weakness. He knew that his work had to come out of the experience of his life, and he knew that the conditions of his time would soon make a great deal of that experience valueless. Because it existed through a peculiar feat of tension and balance it was bound also to die. 'What a man has got

to say is never more than relatively important To kill yourself, like Keats, for what you've got to say, is to mix the eggshell in with the omelette That's Keats's poems to me The very excess of beauty is the eggshell between one's teeth

' I don't take myself seriously, except between 8 and 10 a m, and at the stroke of midnight At other seasons, my say, like any butterfly, may settle where it likes on the lily of the field or the horsetod in the road or nowhere It has departed from me '

There are two ways of regarding Lawrence The first is, qualitatively, as I have done here, regarding especially the descriptive passages in his novels, and the Nature poems in *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* The other and more disappointing way is to consider him primarily as a preacher For although his 'message,' if one may call it that, is very important, and although his attitude to sex and idealized Love is passionate and revealing, his creed is unfortunately confused by his poetic gift of multiple personality Wherever he travelled he seems to have had a gift of entering completely into the existence of the people around him What is unfortunate is that instead of being content with this poetic gift, he seems to have wished to exploit it on behalf of himself and others in order to make himself into some other person He is most notorious, I suppose, for his admiration of Mexican Indians, because of his attempts in *The Plumed Serpent*, particularly, to adopt their beliefs What no one seems to have noticed is, though, that he was always undergoing these transformations, and the transformations were nearly always fatal when they provided him, as it were, with a skin in which he could more effectively appear as a prophet than in his own skin An example of simple transformation is in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*

where Lawrence becomes the gamekeeper, and the gamekeeper talks the gospel of Lawrence

The result of all these transformations is that a rather curious set of beliefs is linked up in Lawrence with various modes of being. Things that he himself could not believe, he managed to believe by turning into a horse, or a Mexican, or the captain in *The Captain's Doll*, or a miner, or a gamekeeper. By these changes he managed to despise in his books people who in life he did not particularly despise, and who seem, indeed, to have been his friends, though for some reason he was rather ashamed of some of his friends. He was also able immensely to increase his own sexual potency, and to despise people who didn't happen to be horses or foxes, or whatever virile animal he happened at the moment to be.

This process is rather similar to Yeats's magic, and it detracts from Lawrence's greatness and even his seriousness as a contemporary writer. For one thing, it enabled him to escape from his real subject, which was modern civilization. His hatred for London seems to have provided him with a motive for writing about London without ever going there or knowing much about it, writing from no motive except an impatience which hardly even amounted to hatred. His hatred for people who were not sexually very potent seems to have developed finally into a kind of sadistic meanness. The unfortunate Sir Clifford in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is pinpricked and tortured all through the book, and for no other reason than that, through no fault of his own, he is a cripple. One may suspect the motives of a writer who imagines that he has some extraordinary grievance against those who are physically weaker than himself, or than a gamekeeper into whose skin he imagines himself. Lastly, Lawrence, even more than James, was committed to the



laugh of the woman Because what is interesting in the laugh of the woman is the same as the binding of the molecules of steel or their action in heat it is the inhuman will, call it physiology, or like Marinetti, physiology of matter, that fascinates me I don't so much care about what the woman *feels*—in the ordinary usage of the word That presumes an *ego* to feel with I only care about what the woman *is*—what she *IS*—inhumanly, physiologically, materially—according to the use of the word . You mustn't look in my novel for the old stable *ego* of the character There is another *ego*, according to whose action the individual is unrecognizable, and passes through, as it were, allotropic states which it needs a deeper sense than any we've been used to exercise, to discover are states of the same single radically unchanged element '

It is unfortunate that these words serve as an apology for his characterization rather than as a manifesto For if he felt this, it is a pity he was not a writer of far greater invention, and a pity that the characters in his novels were often merely portraits of his friends Nevertheless, this passage explains the way in which a new attitude to character is possible to modern writers, and because it rejects the naturalistic novel, it points to new forms, perhaps to the poetic drama



~ PART III

IN DEFENCE OF A POLITICAL SUBJECT

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PART III

IN DEFENCE OF A POLITICAL SUBJECT



## HENRY JAMES AND THE CONTEMPORARY SUBJECT

THE question for a writer of our time, which is at the back of all the discussed questions of belief, and of contemporary sensibility, is what is the modern subject? A subject large enough to enable the poet to write long poems, to make possible a dramatic poetry To free the novel from mere *rapportage* or case history, and yet to relate it to the political life, the morality and manners of the time.

To say that *The Waste Land* 'effects a complete severance between poetry and belief' is in itself almost meaningless what is more explicit is, I think, to say that *The Waste Land* is an example of a long poem without any subject, or in so far as there is any subject, it is the conscious lack of belief, to which I. A. Richards has drawn attention What we are offered instead of a subject is a pattern of diverse impressions. instead of any statement about life or the universe having been made, a kind of historic order has been achieved when the author says, 'These fragments I have shored against my ruins' We are aware of his sense of our unenviable position in the history of our civilization, and of a vast background

What a writer writes about is related to what he believes What he writes about also implies an attitude to the time in which he is living It is here that I. A. Richards's doctrine of 'severance' comes in For if there is conflict

between the belief of the man and the belief of the time in which he is living, the belief that should be positive in the man is turned negative, in its reaction to his contemporaries. In such a situation, there are various courses open to a writer. He may escape entirely from his surroundings, into the past, into the country. The poetry of Walter de la Mare is to-day an example at its most interesting of that kind of an escape into an unreal world. Some of the poetry of W. H. Davies is an example of escape at its most facile. The writer may, on the other hand, try and justify his own position by 'shoring up his fragments,' and postulating an entire world of unbelief around him. This is what produces the appearance of a 'severance between poetry and belief.' But, of course, the writer of *The Waste Land* himself believes. He believes in the part of London where

'the walls

'Of Magnus Martyr hold

Inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold'

What he is chiefly implying, though, is that in other, dead generations, there was a tradition of belief to which he could doubtless have conformed. What he is now implying is that he is living in a time of disbelief. What he is doubting is the efficacy and the value of his own private beliefs.

When I speak of writers who have beliefs, I am now discussing writers whose subjects are moral, or, in the widest sense, political, and I am not thinking of 'pure' artists. I have chosen the writers in this book, because they are political-moral artists who are in the dilemma of Hamlet: they find their lives fixed in a world in which there are no external symbols for their inner sense of values. There is no power, and no glory. They are,

therefore, forced either to satirize the world by showing it up as it really is (you may call such satire amoral, if you like, but to do so, as I hope to show, is a confusion) or they are obliged to try and reconcile the world with themselves, by adopting a hopeful evangelizing tone, or they are obliged to invent a set of symbols of their own, and, in the eyes of the world, like Hamlet, to feign madness, or they may retreat into the realms of pure art. The generation of Henry James, in a tradition carried on through Joyce, Wyndham Lewis, and Ezra Pound, produced a whole series of long (in some cases 'unfinished symphonies'), excellent and unreadable masterpieces, full of moral feeling, but a moral feeling that is not satisfactorily illustrated by the subject.

I now turn again to James, because one sees in his writing, as on a very large-scale map, the course of a great deal of modern literature.

Most criticism of James boils down to saying that he is unreadable. This is a very reasonable complaint, and one that a critic should certainly discuss. But I have tried to show that his unreadability has been attributed to the wrong causes—to his snobbishness, his prudery, and the difficulties of his style.

His method of presentation is, indeed, a sufficient reason for his not becoming a popular classic, in the Dickensian sense, but so far is it from being the real error that makes the neglect of him in a sense justified, it is his greatest contribution to the novel as a form.

What James did in fact revolutionize is the manner of presenting the scene in the novel and the relation of the described scene to the emotional development of the characters. The novel has, of course, in the presentation of the passions, never broken quite away from the tradition of the theatre in Balzac, in Flaubert, in Tolstoy, in



by the introduction of new, accidental material from a world developing outside and independently of the world created in the novel. The danger of this method is to make the novel too self-sufficient, and, while it belongs to a 'realistic' tradition (it purports to describe 'real' characters and real events', and it is not stylized), to ignore what is generally recognized as reality.

Nevertheless, James's approach is not untrue to life: it is not even less 'realistic' than that of the novel based on a dramatic tradition. For the grand *sure passionnelle* is a symptom, but not the root of passion. Passionate activity is intellectual activity. His realization of this is James's great contribution to the novel. The effect of passion is not a momentary display, but a stimulus to thought, which is at once dazzling and intricate. For example, if I am angry about something, the scene in which I display my anger is only a symptom, or at best a cure, of anger. My anger is a continual train of thought expressing itself in many visions, sounds and colours.

I have tried, therefore, to show not only that James's artistic method was justified, but also that his account of our society makes, in effect, an indictment as fierce as that of Baudelaire or, indeed, of a class-conscious Marxist writer. Therefore, if I am still faced with the problem of his unreadability, of some obstacle that prevents his interest in life ever meeting that of the general reader, it seems possible that the cause of this difficulty is something much more fundamental than has been expected.

The real difficulty in Henry James lies in his inescapable individualism. He never found in life a subject that completely dragged him out of himself. It will be remembered that at the opening of *The Golden Bowl* Maggie



Verver and her father are continually faced with their own selfishness. Their problem is, as I have said, to invent some new marriage, by which they can divorce themselves from their own inner world of a marriage between father and daughter, and create a new synthesis, a marriage of the inner with the external world. That was James's own problem. The most objective of writers, his values are yet entirely personal, in the sense that they are wholly acceptable only to a person whose isolation of experience is identified with his own. For example, his attitude to love is not, as has been said, that of a prude, nor yet that of a lover, certainly not of a Donne! It is that of a person who, profoundly with his whole being, after overcoming great inhibition, has accepted the *idea* of people loving. No description of people loving is more moving than his account of Charlotte and Amerigo falling, as it were, into each other's arms. The situation, where the husband of the daughter vows with the wife of the father that they will always protect the father and daughter—and then they break down—has the stain of evil in it which one finds in the Elizabethans. It might be the Duchess of Malfi claiming Antonio. But this is how James describes it, in a passage which I have already quoted.

"‘It's sacred,’" she breathed back to him. They vowed it, gave it out and took it in, drawn, by their intensity, more closely together. Then of a sudden, through this tightened circle, as at the issue of a narrow strait into the sea beyond, everything broke up, broke down, gave way and mingled. Their lips sought their lips, their pressure their response and their response their pressure, with a violence that had sighed itself the next moment to the longest and deepest of stillnesses they sealed their pledge."

Here is Webster

'DUCH

Go, go brag

You have left me heartless, mine is in your  
bosom

I hope 'twill multiply love there You do  
tremble

Make not your heart so dead a piece of flesh,  
To fear more than to love me Sir, be confident  
What is't distracts you? This is flesh and blood,  
sir,

'Tis not the figure cut in alabaster  
Kneels at my husband's tomb Awake, awake,  
man!

I do here put off all vain ceremony,  
And only do appear to you a young widow  
That claims you for her husband, and, like a  
widow,

I use but half a blush in't

ANT

Truth speak for me,  
I will remain the constant sanctuary  
Of your good name.

DUCH

I thank you, gentle love  
And 'cause you shall not come to me in debt,  
Being now my steward, here upon your lips  
I sign your *Quietus est* This you should have  
begged now

I have seen children oft eat sweetmeats thus,  
As fearful to devour them too soon.'

Comparing these two passages, one sees in a striking way the effect of Puritan culture, in the repressed and yet desperately courageous imagery of James

James, after a lifetime of deep human understanding, has arrived at a stage where in suffering and pity he could accept the fact of physical love The incident that to

most people would seem most simple, most common, and yet most peculiar and isolated, is to him universalized as part of the whole cosmos. He cannot make lovers kiss without seeming to cry out, 'I accept this with pity and understanding, just as I accept with my mind everything that is life—and hence the proper subject for Art.' So the lips that meet are not Charlotte's and the prince's, they are the lips of all lovers, and yet they are no lips and no lovers, they are the symbols of James's spiritual acceptance. Whereas Webster in his great play is suddenly able to clinch the reality and the isolation of his lovers by making them speak poetry in the language of prose (he knows that, given their moment of ecstasy, their language cannot fail to be poetry, so the less poetic it is, the better), James is borne away on a flood of poetry which almost drowns his lovers.

His approach to love, his approach to life, his approach to the obvious, is by way of a North-West Passage. The reader never escapes for a moment from the long journey James has made, and on which he is required to accompany him. He cannot watch someone sign a cheque, or give a kiss, or hail a four-wheeler, without being drowned by waves, or smothered in flowers of James's peculiar mental voyage.

The fact is, that whilst the subject of James's book is his morality, and the working out of that morality of love and intelligence in his characters, this morality is fogged and confused by the fact that a very great deal of his work is about nothing except that he is a New Englander who has spent his life trying to reconcile a puritan New England code of morals with his idea of the European tradition. This obstructive element is so obvious in his work that he himself was unconscious of it and tried to exploit it by a number of devices. What I wish especially to be

rouced is that it affected his actual choice of subjects: on that account he devised the 'International Situation,' as he called it, and sent his Americans to Europe, and his Europeans to America. So that what he actually wrote about was decided by a peculiarity of his situation, which it is absurd to expect his reader to share. All his reader can do is imaginatively to enter into it. The privilege the reader is offered is to become Henry James, a highly sensitive, cultured man, with extremely isolated spiritual experiences. Of course, as I have tried to show, there is much more to James than that, but it is this extreme individualism of James in his whole attitude to experience that makes him difficult to read. When one reads James, one is, the whole time, unconsciously compelled to identify one's situation in the universe with his own. One has to accept what one might call the secondary political consequences of his ethic: the necessity of having a large income in order to lead a morally significant life; rules of conduct which make the whole style of conversation become based on gossip and little-trifle, and which yet prevent people from saying the important things even about their relationships with one another. All these superficialities, which so irritate readers of James, are really part of the ritual of his belief in individualism.

I have tried to show how these whims of James's are really linked up with very important convictions which often fundamentally contradict all that lies on the surface. But when we are dealing with a private creed, we need not be surprised if we find contradictions and obscurities. . . there are enough contradictions in our public beliefs. No one is in the least surprised when an ex-Major, who regards war as the embrace of a lover, writes, 'The war gave more life, not less. Yes, life, in spite of all the lives we

lost I feel it, as I stand in the loveliest of all the gardens of our unforgotten dead, looking down on the still waters of the moat at Ypres' Followed by, 'But another war? not that!' The idea brings with it a feeling of horror and despair'<sup>1</sup> James was living in a society whose life is made tolerable by accepting, with an air of joyful mystery, such fundamental contradictions. His own attitude to the war was almost as ambiguous.

James repeatedly insisted, in all sincerity, that he had no political opinion. But actually his writings are full of negative opinion, expressed in his admiration of a system that keeps the kind of society, which he writes about, alive The contradiction in James is the contradiction that has affected the writing of most writers of the late nineteenth, and of this century On the one hand, he is a rebel against the political and economic corruption of his time: he appears as the champion of art against the philistinism of parliamentary ambition. On the other hand, because he is an individualist, because he has worked out in his books his own private system of ethics, which makes it possible for the individual to live æsthetically and morally, in spite of the world around him, he becomes finally a snob, and a supporter of the system, which still makes this existence possible *in spite* of circumstances To say this is not to say that he lost his integrity. it is, rather, to say that he found it. He saw through the political and social life of his time, but he cherished the privilege which enabled him to see through it

The life which James wrote about is now as dead as mutton, and in a sense it never was alive The morality, which is the true subject his novels illustrate, requires for his purpose an ordered society, an aristocracy, and statesman-like figures commanding positions of power.

<sup>1</sup> F Yeats-Brown, *The Days of War*

Remaining true to the realistic tradition of the European novel, he described an Anglo-Saxon society, but exercised all his remarkable power of fantasy (perhaps fantasy is his most peculiar gift) in creating a grand worldly scene in which the wealth of upstarts is as expressive as the wealth of a Renaissance prince. In his novels the royalties and aristocrats are so surrounded by an atmosphere of snobbery, that the snobbery creates an effect of anachronism: the royalties are royal and the aristocrats are real. In fact, James invented the position of his characters: or rather, by a most ingenious turn of his art, he made his characters invent themselves: for is not Maggie Verver inventing herself all the while as 'the princess'? And James's rôle is simply never on any account to betray that she is ridiculous in doing so.

James ought to have written about kings and queens: but, of course, kings and queens are not available to the modern artist, and are far too available to the newspapers. So he therefore had to enhance unknown well-bred scoundrels, like Amerigo, with a legend of social snobbery. He ought to have written about popes, cardinals, and politicians who exert a great deal of worldly power, but to-day there are no holders of power that is a recognized and established value, in the sense that Richelieu had power, the power-mongers keep well behind the scenes. He therefore had to write about monsters who have accumulated mountains of corrupt wealth. Nice monsters, like Mr. Verver, or very bad monsters, like the two old men in *The Ivory Tower*. Lastly, he should have been free to write about lovers, but unfortunately in the world he was describing there was no element of innocence. The only way in which he could free his lovers from the disgrace of 'money-making' was to make them heirs, and to make them heirs was to damn them, as we see

both in *The Wings of the Dove* and, more savagely, in *The Ivory Tower*.

James tried, of course, to write political novels, but the political subject tended to political satire, in *The Princess Casamassima* and *The Tragic Muse*. In order to express moral values he had to invent human values.

In the same way as James is a political-moral artist without a realistic subject drawn from contemporary life to correspond with his ultimate, ethical subject, so Joyce seems to me a religious artist. After his gigantic effort to impose epic values on the modern world, accepted even at its most sordid, he had been compelled not only to invent subjective symbols, but to invent a new language. The same kind of subjectivism, though in an elaborately disguised form, exists in Wyndham Lewis's most ambitious novel, *The Apes of God*.

The key to the subjectivism of all these writers is an intense dissatisfaction with modern political institutions.

# THE GREAT WITHOUT

WHEN I speak of the subject of literary art, I mean something distinct from theme, plot or description, yet essentially related to these. The subject of *Paradise Lost* is the fall of man. But it is much more than this: in contrast to the negative subject of the fall, a great many positive assertions are made, about the order of heaven and earth, and the nature of man. In *Paradise Lost* the subject is a complex of beliefs which the writer is able to share with the reader, and which the reader can accept without straining his credulity. That is to say, the belief is compatible with beliefs that were generally shared by many of Milton's contemporaries.

The position of these accepted beliefs, shared between the author and the reader, is exactly that of nature in nature poetry. The writer and reader are able to meet on the common ground of an agreed subject: the slopes of a mountain, or the existence of God. Most writers make constant use of the accepted beliefs of their time. Shakespeare makes constant use of the conception of power—of kingship—which is the main subject of Elizabethan literature. It is interesting to observe that, as the idea of a central source of power disintegrates, the symbol of power also disperses and is split into many symbols. Marlowe's Tamburlaine, Shakespeare's Mark Antony, Macbeth, Julius Cæsar, Lear, all become dissolved into the cardinals, dukes, princes, duchesses and mothers-in-law of Webster, many



symbols of a uniting power that has become split up into divisions

To take more recent examples, the works of Wells, Bennett, and Shaw, all have as their central subject the most generally accepted of modern beliefs, the idea of progress. It can hardly be disputed that many people to-day believe in scientific progress as the one certain objective reality existing outside themselves, and as independent in its extent and performance as God. However disappointing man is, there is no doubt that machines improve, and that the future of individuals is contrasted with, if not balanced by, immense progress in the objective, mechanistic world. Both Shaw and Wells have made themselves and their works widely acceptable by exploiting this idea, and pointing out that humanity after all acts on the same mechanistic principles as its tools. Shaw talks about the Life Force, and Wells boldly declares on the first page of his *Science of Life* that 'the body is a machine'. He also flatters the human brain by pointing out that it is almost as complicated as a telephone exchange.

The writers whom I have been discussing have not found a subject in any belief that is generally held to-day. The beliefs one finds as part of the general legend created by Yeats's lyrical poetry are recognized rather than generally consented to. People are snobbish about royalty, and yet find Eliot slightly comic in calling himself a royalist, and feel that the qualities which Mr Yeats prays for in the *Prayer for My Daughter*, are anachronistic. They go on making money, accumulating possessions to hand on to their children, when really they believe that they will almost certainly lose their money in the not remote future. In this way behaviour lags behind the immediate processes of life, which are concerned with

what people really believe, and which are the subject of poetry. Poetry is sensitive to new forms of life, long before they have influenced behaviour.

So these writers whom I have been discussing have either reacted from the heresy of Progress, which is the only generally held belief to-day, to the recognized strongholds of religion and aristocratic individualism, or they have attempted to write about life cut off from belief altogether.

Pleasure or sorrow in the incidents of life, cut off from all theorizing or opinion, are the source of lyricism. The lyrical impulse is the impulse simply to sing the joy or sorrow of life, the inspiration is the diversity of appearances, and the sense perhaps of a unity behind them. Therefore it is not surprising that few successful long poems have been written to-day, and that the form of the most successful long poems should be an extension of the lyric, and should owe a great deal to musical forms, such as the symphony and the sonata. On the other hand, it is also not surprising that the writers who have made the most successful alliance with progress should have no difficulty in writing long works, *The Old Wives' Tale*, *Back to Methuselah*, *The World of William Glissold*. Whereas the form of *Ulysses*, Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, *Work in Progress*, has only been achieved with stupendous difficulty. On an altogether smaller scale, Virginia Woolf's most successful novels, *The Waves* and *To the Lighthouse*, are purely lyrical in their inspiration. It is worth remarking, too, that Yeats is most actual and most powerful in his purely lyrical poems, in which he is referring to no background of belief. When he writes a longer poem, such as *The Gift of Harun Al-Rashid* (1923), he has to draw on the magical resources of the early poems.

So there are—to put it crudely—three main attitudes

dividing contemporary writers (1) There is the attitude of the writer who consciously expresses no belief. He or she may be a writer of the kind outlined by I. A. Richards in his account of the Eliot of *The Waste Land*. Or he may be a purely lyrical writer, like Yeats in his shorter poems, or Virginia Woolf in her later novels. (2) There is the attitude of the writer who expresses a private individualistic belief: this book has until now been an account of such writers. (3) There is the writer who interprets an existing belief or foretells a future belief. The two leading beliefs of our time—leading ladies—are Progress and Success, amply interpreted by the majority of writers, excellent, good and indifferent, from Shaw, Wells and Priestley, through Noel Coward and Beverley Nichols downwards. The writers who foretell a future belief are chiefly the communist writers, but to some extent, I think, also the psychologists. I shall discuss them in a later chapter.

Here I am discussing only political-moral writers, not lyricists, and I am primarily interested in writing which is, after all, didactic in origin. I am trying to point out that what a book is actually about is far more important than most of my contemporaries seem to imagine: that a writer equipped with a fine technique should experience the same kind of difficulty in finding a subject as Beethoven had in finding a libretto for his opera. I want also to show that there are things going on in the world that are worth writing about, and I think that the predominance of autobiographical themes, particularly in fiction, is a sign of the neglect of subject-matter, if not of the decadence of style. I am not saying that writers should write in any particular way or according to anyone's direction, but at times it seems that the political movements of the time have a much greater moral sig-

nificance than the life of the individual, and, indeed, the chief peculiarity of the individual is that his acts are morally unrelated to the political movement such a time is the present, and my attempt in this book is to turn the reader's and writer's attention outwards from himself to the world.

ing, in this prose, as vehemently italicised as Queen Victoria's correspondence, is the type of modern fiction. Where Lewis seems to me wrong, is in imagining that the subject-matter of a writer is identical with his moral subject. To Lewis, it is sufficient praise or dispraise of a book to report its factual content, without making any allowance for the attitude of the author, or the state of society which he is describing, nevertheless, he makes great allowance for the workmanship of books and the quality of writing. Lewis tries to show that Hemingway is almost identical with his hero (the 'I' of *A Farewell to Arms* has many of Hemingway's exploits to his credit), and therefore that Hemingway's attitude to the universe is identical with that of his hero. This may be true, and, if so, it certainly is damaging to any defence of the autobiographical novel, but the Lewis method is less satisfying when it is applied by Mario Praz in a book called *The Romantic Agony*, extending to several hundred pages, to literature since the nineteenth century. Professor Praz summarizes the plots and matter of some hundreds of romantic and post-romantic poems and fictions, and exposes their decadent nature, the predominance of themes of perversion and diabolism. This is salubrious, but not entirely explicit, because unless one considers very carefully the attitude of each writer in turn (which Professor Praz does not do) it is not clear whether his exposure is of a literature, or a civilization, or both. Lewis is an admirer of Professor Praz, and indeed considers him as his disciple ('this gigantic pile of satanic bric-a-brac, so industriously assembled, under my directions, cf *The Diabolic Principle*, etc'), but when he all too mildly wonders why his follower has not brought his inquiry further up-to-date, perhaps he forgets how embarrassing would be the results of this simplified



because no mind of the first order, expressing itself in art, has ever itself been taken in, or consented to take in others, by the crude injunctions of any purely moral code'<sup>1</sup>

' It is my belief that "satire" *for its own sake*—as much as anything else for its own sake—is possible and that even the most virtuous and well-proportioned of men is only a shadow, after all, of some perfection, a shadow of an imperfect, and hence an "ugly," sort'<sup>2</sup>

This seems quite plausible as a defence of a kind of satiric realism. But Lewis has now to explain what are the fitting objects of satire. So we are told that to-day art should be essentially a massacre not of the innocents, but of the insignificants. He goes on (quite rightly) to defend satirists for attacking unimportant but pretentious individuals, rather than the great. However, he is still in difficulties, because he seems aware that, by leaving out the moral element, he has simply constructed a satirist who is a sort of automaton. A satirist who attacks everyone (except the really significant), but who has no particular reason (except prejudice?) for attacking one set of people rather than another. We are now told that satire in itself is *good* (pp 121-125). This, though, is a return to the moralist thesis, so there follows a chapter called 'Is Satire Real?' in which we are told, 'The sort of question we shall have to ask ourselves will rather be *Is Satire Real?* than *Is Satire Good?*'

Confusing as all this is, Lewis makes his points with great force, and his argument is illustrated with observations that are often brilliant. The tendency in literature from which he reacts is that of producing 'a tumultuous stream of evocative, spell-bearing vocables, launched at your head—or poured into your Unconscious . . . It

<sup>1</sup> *Men without Art*, p 108

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p 109

may be an auriferous mud, but it must remain mud—not a clear but a murky picture. As a literary medium it is barbaric.<sup>1</sup>

Except when Lewis shows traces of a personal animosity, as he often does in his attacks on D H Lawrence, Virginia Woolf and E M Forster, the main effect of his enemy attack is extremely tonic. But his book contains two confusions to which it is very important to draw attention.

The first confusion is that Lewis seems to believe that the romantic-decadent failing of the internal in Joyce and his followers can be corrected simply by a writer studiously describing the outside of things. 'The *external* approach to things belongs to the "classical" manner of apprehending.' 'The *external* approach to things (relying upon the evidence of the *eye* rather than of the more emotional organs of sense) can make of "the grotesque" a healthy and attractive companion.' 'Dogmatically, then, I am for the Great Without, for the method of *external* approach—for the wisdom of the eye rather than that of the ear.'<sup>2</sup> Obviously something is going wrong when we are asked to assume that classicism (including all the greatest poetry of the world) ignores the wisdom of the ear (it is questionable whether even classical architecture does not appeal to an imagery which is partly metrical and aural). The confusion becomes still more evident when Lewis goes on to say, 'To put this in a nutshell, it is *the shell* of the animal that the plastically-minded artist will prefer. The ossature is my favourite part of a living organism, not its intestines.'<sup>3</sup> But the ossature is just as much inside an animal as the intestine, and the intestine of a human being is also just as much on the surface and affects the shell, as does the backbone. Moreover, in an age when abdominal operations are so common,

<sup>1</sup> *W. L. G.* at *Int.*, p. 127

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120



it is impossible for most people not to realize that the intestines can be made visible and all too apparently part of the Great Without, just as much as are the bones. Lewis has in fact transferred his objection to the 'Unconscious' to the intestines. It is reasonable to suspect, therefore, that he is trying to rationalize an objection to the morally decadent subjects of a type of literature, in order to make his objection fit in with the theory of the eye and the Great Without. In a word, Lewis is trying to discover a simple formula which will completely externalize his own writing and make it independent of the 'interior' school of fiction. His whole argument is over-simplified. It is like saying that a man who has pulmonary tuberculosis can get well by pretending that he has no lungs. Only the outside of his body is *real*.

The second and more important confusion arises from the same simplification. The argument seems to be that because the external is the classic, and the internal is decadent, therefore the subject of a book must be as external as possible. The writer must be a satirist, and he must be non-moral in his satire, because if the satirist starts being a moralist, then the internal creeps in again. Lewis seems to insist, in fact, that the subject of a book should be, as simply as possible, what is described. Therefore he emphasizes the importance of action and the importance of the will. Why, though, without any moral motive, should the satirist want to make humanity ridiculous? Lewis answers, in effect, that the satiric mind is lyrical, in the sense in which I have described the lyric as an amoral comment on the nature of life. 'It is difficult to see how the objective truth of much that is called "Satire" can be less true than the truth of the lyrical declamation, in praise, for instance, of a lovely mistress. There is, in

both cases, *another* truth, that is all. But both are upon an equal intellectual footing, I think—only the humanly ‘agreeable’ is more often false than the humanly “disagreeable.” That is unavoidable, seeing what we are.<sup>1</sup>

This analogy is false, because of all forms the love-lyric may become the least concerned with the mere external shell, and is the most apt to become ‘visceral.’ Is it true that classical literature in which there is the greatest amount of action, the greatest amount of the Without, and everything required by Wyndham Lewis, is unmoral? The morality of *The Odyssey* is certainly strange and cut off from us, but just because it is so cut off, we realize that Ulysses is a moral figure. If *The Odyssey*, then, is both external *and* moral, there can be no intrinsic connexion between the external and the unmoral in literature. The whole distinction is deceptive and false.

Is Lewis’s own satire unmoral? *The Apes of God* is a satire on a group of people who have pretensions as artists. They are contrasted with a figure called Pierpoint, who mysteriously hovers in the background, who represents a seriousness and reality, in contrast to their ape-like lives of mutual admiration and gesticulation. Lewis, like Henry James, D. H. Lawrence and Ezra Pound, has strong moral feelings about the position of the artist in modern life. If one turns back from *The Apes of God* to his criticism, one sees why this business of the pseudo-artist contrasted with the real artist is a subject of such moral importance.

‘*Thou shalt not steal*—let us see how that is getting on. All the great group of ethical safeguards that accompany that central notion are to-day in the most intimate manner in disarray. For, as everyone knows, “individualism” is a *far* greater sin than stealing from an *individual*—from

<sup>1</sup> *Men without Art*, p. 122

your neighbour. If, for instance, to take a vivid illustration, a woman writer were shown this manuscript before I got it published, and supposing she took a fancy to anything she saw there and supposing she took it into her head to *steal* it, lock, stock, and barrel! What redress have I? The Law Courts? My dear sir, those are places for richer men than I am. The judgement of the public would be this—"That was a smart old girl who stole that fellow-author's idea, that was!" And, of course, a "brain-picker" is one of the most popular of criminals, for "brains" are a rather rare and aristocratic sort of "possession" <sup>1</sup>

The Apes are satirized because they are thieves and brain-pickers, and pseudo-artists. The subject of this satire is moral indignation, even though Lewis may have no moral axe to grind, and is no politician. But actually this amorality is in itself a moral point of view, because it is related to the old question that has cropped up so often in these pages, of the position of the artist in society. Lewis's amorality and unpoliticism applies only to the artist: it is not anarchy.

To say that the artist has no moral axe to grind is not the same as to say that his art is amoral. This is a false hypothesis. Very clear examples of the amoral artist writing morally are to be found in the Elizabethans especially in the works of Webster and Tourneur. Our best example is Tourneur's play *The Revenger's Tragedy*, for this is largely satire and meets Lewis on his own ground. It presents a really savage picture of a society in which there is no one who is not an adulterer, incestuous and murderous. All that distinguishes the hero Vendice from the other characters is that he has got their vices on the brain, but we do not feel that this young man,

<sup>1</sup> *Men without Art*, p. 219

who plots a ghastly murder of revenge because his mistress has been destroyed by a duke, is morally superior to his enemies. What we do realize is that his passion, although it takes no moral form, is essentially a moral feeling, an overwhelming vision of death and corruption of himself and even his dead mistress also as objects of corruption. Vendice is not a moralizing figure. he is an artist prostrated with the moral vision of what the life around him means.

So here we have satire which is moral, although the writer is himself no moralist. It is a type of art which Lewis has scarcely considered sufficiently. The point is that the artist may, and to some extent must, be an object of his own contemplation, even when he is looking at other people. He cannot stand completely outside the process of history in which he is involved, and outside his own environment. The difficulty with *The Apes of God* is precisely that the writer is not an object of his own satire. One feels always that he is self-consciously put above his creatures, and that the criticism which he applies to them he throws at them (mud-slinging) and therefore away from himself. In *Gulliver's Travels* one never feels that Swift is watching and admonishing his puppets, so they live. One always feels Lewis watching his apes, forcing them to give themselves away and to behave idiotically, so that in spite of the brilliant visual trick of his descriptions, they become puppets. The moment he abandons description his work becomes cerebral. compare the chapter in *The Apes of God* called *Chez Lionel Klein, Esq*, with that called *The Virgin*. *The Virgin* is external, savage and brilliant, the other is full of chatter like the talk of disembodied ghosts. It fails in the same way as the gossip in *The Awkward Age* fails. it defeats its own ends, by just presenting the kind of

silly gossip satirized, so that it remains no more important or interesting than the original

The fact is that by imposing an external order on internal disorder, by ruggedly insisting on and accepting only the outsides of things, one does not improve matters. One merely shouts and grows angry with anyone who has a point of view different from one's own. For another point of view is sure to seem visceral, internal, decadent. One is, in a word, merely asserting that one is afraid of the symptoms which one dislikes in oneself, and more particularly in other people, not that one can cure them.

Take this insistence on the external into the world of politics, and what is it but fascism? It is saying that we must suppress the effeminate, dark members of our society (the Jews), we must arrange our façade to look as well as possible, to appeal to the eye (the private armies), we must drive the symptoms of decadence underground. It is not surprising, then, that when Lewis went to Germany, a few years before the Nazi revolution, he was deeply impressed by the Hitler movement, and found much to admire in its attack on the fashionable decadence of the West End of Berlin. It is worth pointing out, though, that the extensive brown façade, spread out to obliterate German homosexuality, turned out to have within itself far deeper crevices than anything it hid.

We may now consider, in the light of Lewis's analytic method, another book, *The Invaders* by William Plomer. This book is not a satire, but it is a study of people who drift. Except that Plomer has a very brilliant eye for the external, this book is *par excellence* everything which Lewis dislikes. A great many unemployed people constantly drift from the provinces into London, and stay there, somehow making a living, or they drift back again.

A few of these Plomer selects as the Invaders they are essentially dumb oxen. They are the people to whom things happen, who are acted upon, who have never sat up and realized that they are living in the greatest crisis the world has ever seen. Of course, in a well-regulated fascist state, writers, with their eyes well-drilled to look at the creative, external lives, would ignore these human viscera, these will-less heroes. They are Hemingway heroes raised or reduced to the nth power. But Plomer has written about them. But I am afraid that worse is to follow. For another character in the novel is a 'gent, Nigel, who has a homosexual friendship with the drifter Chick, who joins the Guards. In this relationship the will-lessness of two classes of society meets, as it were, and joins hands. Chick is will-less, because he drifts, submits to the army, becomes, as a soldier, the incarnation of the willed as distinct from the willing. He also becomes entangled with a girl who needs money, which he must get from Nigel, and thus the money passing from Nigel to him, from him to the girl, corrupts and confuses all their relationships. Nigel, on the other hand, is also will-less, because he exercises his developed sensibility simply to understand and not to control his affair with Chick.

Now, supposing we get Lewis to agree that the subject-matter of *The Invaders* is all right as long as the approach is satiric. For that seemed the point of his attack on Hemingway. One can quite well imagine Nigel being satirized: indeed, the novel leaves me wishing rather that Plomer's approach to him had been more external, in the Lewis sense. But could anyone in his senses externalize, that is to say satirize, the Invaders themselves, because they are unemployed, because they drift, and are controlled by the wills of others? Turn

now to *The Awkward Age*, *The Apes of God*, or W H Auden's *The Orators*, to take the work of three different generations, and one sees at once that this kind of satire is a game that can only be applied to a certain class. It is essentially public school satire. Henry James's and Wyndham Lewis's subjects came, it is true, from the very best public schools. Auden's selection is more miscellaneous. The point is, though, that this kind of satire is confined to a very small clique, both of writers and readers. It is destructive, because it is lacking in wide application: it is the image of Caliban raging at his own face in the mirror: the writer, hemmed in by a Bloomsbury or public school tradition, hates other members of his clique because they bear features which he recognizes in himself or his friends. Auden's satire is much wider than this, only because it has a revolutionary application, but it does not altogether escape the charge of being public or even preparatory school satire.

It seems, then, that if literature is suffering from a neurosis, we cannot escape from it by ignoring it, and by observing only the shell of our world, and attacking our own faults as we find them in our friends.

## XII

### POETRY AND PITY

AT this point it seems necessary in a short aside to consider the case of artists who are political, but yet who write primarily to express an attitude of mind for instance, love or pity

There is a difference between a morality of love, and an attitude of love. In expressing an attitude of love only, a writer is implying that it is an attitude adequate to the experience which he is describing.

Wilfred Owen, in the Preface to his Poems, makes his attitude—which in any case is clear in his poetry—doubly clear by a straightforward statement

‘My subject is War, and the pity of War

‘The poetry is in the pity

‘Yet these elegies are to this generation in no sense consolatory. They may be to the next. All a poet can do to-day is to warn. That is why the true Poets must be truthful.’

In other words, an attitude of pity—a pity which is fierce and in no sense consolatory—is the only attitude possible for him to adopt towards the War. But he fully realizes that to another generation, a post-war generation, pity would not suffice as the inspiration of poetry. The poetry is only in the pity when the motive for pity is quite overwhelming. An immense and terrifying pity is the extreme unction of tragedy, the poetry in the pity of the last act of *King Lear*, or in Greek tragedy. This kind of pity was forced on to Owen, by his sense that the



War was quite beyond his control. The external circumstances of his suffering were forced on to him, and it was his job to create a synthesis by which he could accept them; he could not do more than accept them. But another generation cannot just accept the War as if it were a purely natural disaster. In order to achieve our synthesis, analysis is required as well. And it seems that the analysis must be in historical and in psychological terms. The difficulty is to reconcile the history and the psychology.

Except in circumstances of catastrophic accident, or of resignation to a predestined fate, pity is not an adequate emotion in poetry. It tends to become negative, exhausting, sentimental, masochistic. The only way it can avoid sentimentality is to plunge into extreme subjectivity and become projected as self-pity.

In one of Owen's last and most beautiful poems, *Miners*, his feeling of pity seems to have reached a stage one step beyond which would lead him to a subjective world.

'I thought of some who worked dark pits  
Of war, and died  
Digging the rock where Death reposes  
Peace lies indeed

Comforted years will sit soft-chaired  
In rooms of amber,  
The years will stretch their hands, well-cheered  
By our lives' ember

The centuries will burn rich loads  
With which we groaned,  
Whose warmth shall lull their dreaming lids  
While songs are crooned  
But they will not dream of us poor lads  
Lost in the ground '

Beautiful as these lines are, one sees that the poet is conjuring up an emotion of pity in order to achieve them—he is not writing because he believes that the lives of the men who dig coal and who die in wars could in any way be altered, or, on the other hand, are in any way justified. His one emotion is a passive grief for the men and boys. The difficulty is, that poetry inspired by pity is dependent on that repeated stimulus for its inspiration. If Owen had survived the War, he would presumably have been compelled either to become a writer with some political philosophy, or else he must have harked back constantly to his war memories for inspiration. That has happened to other war writers, who go back to the War in search of ghosts and horrors, not in search of any explanations.

Owen may indeed have been a far greater loss than any of us know, because he evidently realized that his war poetry could only represent a *transitional* attitude, when he wrote 'All a poet can do to-day is to warn'. He meant that the next generation must occupy itself with different problems.

In his few poems Owen did not merely make a record of his experience, he made an architecture. He is not dictated to, even by suffering. A great deal has been written about his poetry, but I do not think that anyone has pointed out how very different all his poems are from each other. Each poem takes an entirely different aspect of the War, centred always in some incident, and builds round it. In the few notes which he left for the plan of his book, one sees that each of these poems was meant to contribute to a whole edifice—he had planned a book of true poetry about the War, not a series of poems about the War.

There are, of course, artists who live in the spirit of

Owen's preface For example, when Lawrence revolts, in his *Last Poems*, and in many of his stories, against love, he is not merely rebelling against the manners of his time; he is implying that the conventional romantic idea of love, of the sort which 'makes the world go round,' is not an adequate attitude towards experience for an artist who wants to produce good work

Owen is an impersonal artist in a sense that James, Joyce, Yeats and Eliot are scarcely ever impersonal He is not objectifying his private mental experience, and 'thus escaping from personality' The pressure of meaning in his poetry is not the pressure of self-expression, of his private utterance, but the pressure of a whole world of everything that is not himself, of war, of an actuality that is scarcely even interpreted in his poetry, but which is re-created through it In his art he is not creating his own world, he is re-creating the external world

For this reason his technique, although it is striking and original, is subsidiary to his meaning Although his use of assonance is a completely successful way of expressing what he has to say, one can quite well imagine his war poetry written in a different medium in a very individual free verse, or dramatically, or in a use of conventional forms as original and concentrated as, for example, the sonnets of Gerard Manley Hopkins His style is not, in fact, indistinguishable from its content, it is simply a very effectively invented means of conveying it Nor is it limited to a particular use: it has been adapted by young writers far more effectively than the styles of either Eliot or Hopkins I think it is true to say that Owen is the most useful influence in modern verse, although he is a lesser poet than Hopkins or Eliot Eliot has proved a dangerous influence, because his style

is dictated by the needs of his poetry, it does not merely contain the poetry. As yet it has not been shown whether the forms he has invented could hold the experience of any other poet

It follows from this that the medium of Joyce and Eliot is identified with its content, in this sense it is subjective, and, although it may influence other writers, it cannot be adapted, like a fixed mode of verse, and used as a container for quite other ideas. Eliot's verse form is not a container for certain ideas that struggle towards expression. what is expressed in his verse, as well as thought, is the form itself, and particular musical effects. The subject of Eliot's poetry is the poetry itself, and a particular set of reactions to a subjective world which the writer has largely invented, but which contains recognizable fragments of the external world

What one finds in Eliot is a remarkable capacity for cerebral experience, a remarkable gift of annotation, a remarkable neglect of nature. Owen's poetry, on the other hand, exists by its reference to some external object. if it had not been the War, it might have been the industrial towns, and the distressed areas

### XIII

## WRITERS AND MANIFESTOS

I. A. RICHARDS writes, in his *Science and Poetry*, that 'over whole tracts of natural emotional response we are to-day like a bed of dahlias whose sticks have been removed' The sticks are our beliefs In his note on *The Waste Land* he adds that 'a sense of desolation, of uncertainty, of futility, of the groundlessness of aspirations, of the vanity of endeavour, and a thirst for a life-giving water which seems suddenly to have failed, are the signs in consciousness of this necessary reorganization of our lives' Eliot 'has given a perfect emotive description of a state of mind which is probably inevitable for a while to all meditative minds'

This state of mind is a state of complete unbelief 'In the destructive element immerse. That is the way,' he approvingly quotes James ('Thank God, I have no opinions') Yeats

('Things fall apart, the centre cannot hold,  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.')

and Eliot (in *The Waste Land*) all stood on the verge of this destructive element, but decided not to go in But the important fact is that it is there, that it is *realized*. It is realized in Yeats's mythology, in James's desperate individualism, in Eliot's retreat to the Anglo-Catholic Church

The question is whether this despairing stage is now

over, whether it is now possible for the artist to discover a system of values that are not purely subjective and individualistic, but objective and social, real in the world of a society *outside* the artist in the same way as Nature is real

In spite of the attempts of various imperialist poets to carry on a buccaneering tradition, the nationalist European state does not provide a sense of historic purposiveness it does not convince one of its reality. The history of nationalities which we see around us, which we live in, is not a full tide bearing us forward, ours is not an Elizabethan age. On the contrary, the trend of contemporary history, so far from giving us direction, has not even the merit of being obvious. It does not decide our attitude; we have to adopt some analytic attitude towards it. We may, for example, simply think of Europe in terms of War. A war carried on, it is true, by political and economic means, after the combatants, who are exhausted, have stopped fighting. Nevertheless a war of victorious allies (with whatever shifting alliances) holding down forcibly a defeated enemy, and waiting anxiously and preparedly for the moment when he will rise and start to fight again. This is a time then when anyone who is anxious to avert such a protracted world war will have to work very hard to undermine the whole system of armed alliances. If we hope to go on existing, if we want a dog's chance of a right to breathe, to go on being able to write, it seems that we have got to make some choice outside the private entanglements of our personal life. We have got to try somehow to understand that objective life moving down on us like a glacier, but which, after all, is essentially not a glacier, is an historic process, the life of people like ourselves, and therefore our 'proper study.'

The point is that it is almost impossible for an artist to-day—a believing artist, one who is not simply an individualist-anarchist—to live entirely in the present, because the present is chaotic. If we want beliefs, or even a view of history, we must either turn back to the past, or we must exercise our imaginations to some degree, so that we live in the future.

It is not a question of sticks for dahlias. The answer to that remark is, 'Don't be a dahlia, and you won't need a stick.' It is a question of what in the widest sense is going to be the social or political subject of writing. If the subject of writing is political justice and political freedom, it is no longer possible with consistency to be a writer who satirizes a small clique of literary dilettanti, who insists on regarding only the surface of his characters, who prides himself only on the eye, and on having an eye which ignores the more emotive centres. Literary fascism goes with political fascism. If, then, one believes that freedom, justice and other moral qualities are desirable, if one wants to write about these things (I am not saying or even implying that one should want to do so), if one conceives that the subject of writing is the moral life of one's time, in the same way as the subject of Greek Tragedy is moral, and *Everyman* is a morality, and the subject of *Tao Te Ching* is the art of ruling and being ruled, then to-day one is in a very difficult situation. The precise difficulty is to write about this moral life in a way that is significant to find the real moral subject. The emphasis of our realistic tradition is entirely on the reality of externals—of nature, of mechanics, of acts. If one speaks of any other kind of reality one is suspected of a kind of idealism, which is rightly suspect of projecting one's own hopes and fears, of inventing dreams in which one fulfils translated sexual wishes. Yet the fact remains

that certain manifestations of what I call moral life are perfectly real as real as chairs and tables, and far more dangerously alive than most human beings. Indeed, if they are neglected, they draw attention to themselves in wars and revolutions. Such realities are the lust for power, the sense of guilt, and the most overwhelming of all is a life which is much larger than individuals, the whole life of the time, larger even than the personal life, and threatening to destroy the personal life if it is not realized and given room to develop.

I call all this as a subject 'moral' rather than 'psychological,' because I am concerned with a whole series of conflicts which contribute to the stream of contemporary life. I am not concerned with the sense of guilt and the lust for power, analytically, but with the direction of society produced by the complex of all of these. On the whole, then, to call this general tendency the 'moral' life rather than the 'psychological' life seems, paradoxically, the more impartial term. For if I call it 'psychological,' I am bound to analyse and condemn certain undesirable elements—the sense of guilt, and the lust for power. If I call it moral I am simply concerned with understanding the whole tendency, and accepting that as the resolved and deepest life of our time.

'We can no longer permit life to be shaped by a personified ideal, we must serve with all our faculties some actual thing,' Yeats has written in a recent preface<sup>1</sup>. This seems to me true. The 'actual thing' is the true moral or widely political subject that must be realized by contemporary literature, if that literature is itself to be moral and serious—that is to say, if it is to be the true successor of James. Any other art will tend to become a 'personified ideal.' The weakness of Lawrence is in this

<sup>1</sup> *The Words Upon the Window Pane*



tendency He wrote about a kind of life which was serious and real, but whereas he meant to write about people, about the life around him, he tended, as he went on, only to write about himself For, in his search for values, he invented a way of life that did not betray those values but, most unfortunately, it was only possible to himself It was the outcome of a personal struggle, and the result dangerously bordered on the 'personified ideal'

It seems, then, that the position of writers who are endeavouring to serve some 'actual thing'—that is, who are endeavouring to write about it—is worth considering Cecil Day Lewis has said

'Yet living here,  
As one between two massing powers I live  
Whom neutrality cannot save  
Nor occupation cheer

None such shall be left alive  
The innocent wing is soon shot down  
And private stars fade in the blood-red dawn  
Where two worlds strive

The red advance of life  
Contracts pride, calls out the common blood,  
Beats song into a single blade,  
Makes a depth-charge of grief

Move then with new desires,  
For where we used to build and love  
Is no man's land, and only ghosts can live  
Between two fires'

The poem asserts that two worlds exist and are fight-

ing· the striving worlds are obviously intended to represent the class war, or at all events the rivalry between revolution and reaction. This contest is so important that neutrality is impossible 'The innocent wing is soon shot down, And private stars fade in the blood-red dawn' The poet is evidently on the side of 'The red advance of life,' because he believes that 'only ghosts can live between two fires.'

The poem, then, is not only about Communism. it also has a propagandist element. it argues, and some of the argument is, to say the least, controversial For example, the simplification of issues might seem to some people premature, if not grotesque But this does not really affect the real claim of the poem to value The implicit assertion of the poem is that it is about realities that the struggle between two worlds is *real*—as real as the descriptions of environment in novels—that the material of the poem is life

If I am right in saying that the struggle of Communism or Socialism against the anti-Socialist forces of the whole world exists, I think that the reader, in judging left-wing literature, must not judge it in the same way as he argues against Communism It is not a question of whether he thinks the premises are false, but of whether the premises are about realities, in the sense that there are political and moral realities which are more enduring than the external world of literary realism. What he should ask is—Does this Communist approach lead to a greater and more fundamental understanding of the struggle affecting our whole life to-day?

Now, one of the chief claims of Communism as a political creed is that it is materialist. The materialist conception of history, the theory of surplus value, the idea of crystallized labour· all these are solids, they are

material subject-matter and yet move in the world of ideas. The writer who grasps anything of Marxist theory, feels that he is moving in a world of reality, and in a purposive world, not merely a world of obstructive and oppressive *things*.

Lastly, it is as well to remember that perhaps the most fundamental of all beliefs illustrated by drama and poetry, in all history, is the idea of justice. We live in an age when we have become conscious of great social injustice, of the oppression of one class by another, of nationalities by other nations. Communism, or Socialism in its completed form, offers a just world—a world in which wealth is more equally distributed, and the grotesque accumulation of wealth by individuals is dispersed in which nations have no interest in destroying each other in the manner of modern war, because the system of competitive trade controlled by internecine and opposed capitalist interests is abolished.

These aims are so broad and so just that no amount of abuse and sneering can affect the people who hold them. It is no use telling me, for example, that I am a bourgeois-intellectual, that I know nothing, or next to nothing, of the proletariat. All that and a lot more may be true. The point is, though, that if I desire social justice I am not primarily concerned with myself, I am concerned with bringing into being a world quite external to my own interests, in the same way as when one writes a poem one is allowing the poem to have its own, impersonal, objective being, one is not shoving oneself into it.

The Socialist artist is concerned with realizing in his own work the ideas of a classless society—that is to say, applying those ideas to the life around him, and giving them their reality. He is concerned with a change of heart.

He is not primarily concerned with ways and means, and he is not paralysed by the argument that the economic system is rigid. The economic system was made for man, and not man for the economic system, so that if man changes—that is to say, if he has a new and strong conception of justice—the economic system will also change.

It also follows that the writer is primarily interested in man, and not in systems, not even in a good economic system. Systems are rigid, and they must always be forced externally—by external criticism—to change. In that sense, art, because it insists on human values, is a criticism of life.

Good architecture is a criticism of slums. Good painting is a criticism of the pictures we have, the clothes we wear, all the appearances with which we surround ourselves. Good poetry is a criticism of language, of the way in which we express ourselves, the direction of our thoughts, the words we hand down to our children. Our industrial civilization has proved almost impervious to that criticism of life which we find in architecture, painting, music and poetry. Art has been resisted, and the artists have been driven to form cliques with a private language and private jokes. But no system can afford to be without the criticism of art. The whole point of artists adopting a revolutionary position, is that their interests may become social, and not anti-social, and that their criticism may help to shape a new society.

When one considers the position of artists in a Socialist state, it is well, therefore, to remember that the art which has 'roots in the masses' must be free to tell the truth and to criticize life. Lenin said, 'Art belongs to the people. It ought to extend with deep roots into the very thick of the broad toiling masses. It ought to be intelli-

gible to these masses and loved by them. And it ought to unify the feeling, thought and will of these masses, elevate them. It ought to arouse and develop artists among them.'

A democratic art has always been popular with certain writers, who have appealed in their work from a small set of fellow artists to the people. The point of such an appeal is that by widening his audience the artist also widens and deepens his subject-matter: he draws strength from deeper roots. The writer who is starving because he cannot reach any audience but a small clique, and who finds the whole literature, painting and music of his time a prey to the same cliquiness, will suspect that there is something wrong with our sectarian literature. Now, whatever may be the faults of Russian writers to-day, they do at least reach a wide audience, and they do succeed in writing about matters which passionately concern the people. In order to awaken this wide interest they don't play down to their audience in the fashion of our popular writers.

Nevertheless, Russian literature suffers, or has until recently suffered, from its own sectarianism, which consisted in the establishment of what amounted to a monopoly of publishing and criticism by a small group of writers who formed an organization called RAPP (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers). The business of this union, and of various companion societies was to insist on the proletarianization of art, and to persecute artists who were not correct in their party ideology. Max Eastman has written a book, called *Artists in Uniform*, which is an extremely prejudiced account of the activities of RAPP. He is clearly carrying on a bitter personal vendetta against the editors of the American Communist periodical, *New Masses*, which he finds to be

subservient to Moscow. He is also a Trotskyist, and a violent critic of the Stalin dictatorship. He draws attention to all the blunders of RAPP, but he does not emphasize that some writers have been well treated. For example, he ignores Nekrassov, and he is so anxious to prove that RAPP has destroyed all literary talent in the Soviet, that Gladkov, to take one example, is not mentioned in his book. In spite of these defects of over-statement, the indictment he draws up is alarming, and, in some ways, almost overwhelming. There are many examples of persecution by RAPP. The suicides of Yessenin and Maiakovsky may have been inevitable, since their faulty 'individualism' perhaps made it, in any case, impossible for them to adapt themselves to the revolution. Far more serious is the case of Zamyatin, whose novel, *We*, was not published in the Soviet, but was pirated in a Prague *émigré* magazine: this misfortune was used as a frame-up against Zamyatin, and he was compelled to live in exile. Romanov, who is well known in England for his novel, *Three Pairs of Silk Stockings*, was so unfortunate as to receive a favourable review in the London *New Statesman*, in which the reviewer remarked that it was a mystery that Romanov's book should be allowed to appear in Soviet Russia. The mystery did not cease, but Romanov was compelled to recant publicly. Another writer, Pilnyak, on being charged with counter-revolutionary tendencies, managed to make an art of humiliating himself and begging for Marxist instruction: he has become one of the most prosperous writers in the Union.

Since RAPP no longer exists, Eastman's indictment may seem irrelevant, because I do not suppose that even the Soviet Government would now defend RAPP'S actions. But he holds that matters are now little, if at

all, better, and that RAPP was only liquidated because its destructive function was completely performed. The next few years will show whether or not this accusation is just but meanwhile Eastman's charges should be read and considered. It is not enough to dismiss him as a counter-revolutionary, if what he says is true. The following principles were dictated to the Kharkov literary congress, a meeting of Communist writers from every part of the world, by Auerbach, a young representative of the bureaucracy<sup>1</sup>

(1) Art is a class weapon

(2) Artists are to abandon 'individualism' and the fear of strict 'discipline' as petty bourgeois attitudes

(3) Artistic creation is to be systematized, organized, 'collectivized,' and carried out according to the plans of a central staff like any other soldierly work

(4) This is to be done under the 'careful and yet firm guidance of the Communist Party'

(5) Artists and writers of the rest of the world are to learn how to make proletarian art by studying the experience of the Soviet Union

(6) 'Every proletarian artist must be a dialectical materialist. The method of creative art is the method of dialectic materialism'

(7) 'Proletarian literature is not necessarily created by the proletariat, it can also be created by writers from the petty bourgeoisie,' and one of the chief duties of the proletarian writer is to help the non-proletarian writers 'overcome their petty bourgeois character and accept the viewpoint of the proletariat'

It is evident that the aim of this manifesto is to convert art into an instrument that can be used for party purposes. It is not the business of the artist to see, but to conform

<sup>1</sup> See Chap. I of *Artists in Uniform* by Max Eastman

He must not be a two-edged instrument which might turn against the party. It is his business to go where he is sent and to observe what he is told.

There is not the least doubt that a great many Communists look on art purely as a party instrument. To take a small instance, I read in a proposed manifesto sent by Alec Brown to *Left Review*,<sup>1</sup> that 'during the initial period of our magazine [it is] most important to carry on rigorous criticism of all highbrowism, intellectualism, abstract rationalism, and similar dilettantism'. And what do these abusive terms mean, one may ask? The answer is only too simple: it is everything that WE happen not to agree with ideologically.

It may be argued that there is a severe censorship now in almost every European country except Russia, and that even in England there is no longer any great freedom of speech. But there is a great difference between even the severest and most stupefying censorship and the attempt to regard art as a mere instrument in party hands, which is illustrated in the Kharkov manifesto. The difference is that censorship cuts or bans books when they are already written; the principles laid down in this manifesto order the manner in which books should be written, what they should be about, and what attitude the writer should adopt to his subject. No censorship has ever gone so far as this. This instrumentalization permits too the rise of a school of critics whose business simply is to apply the canon. To attack writers because they are bourgeois, because their novels, if they are about life as they know it, are not proletarian, or, if they are about the working-classes, because their attitude is not revolutionary enough. In July 1934 an article appeared in *New Masses* attacking Auden, Day Lewis,

<sup>1</sup> *Left Review*, No. 3, December 1934.



and myself, because we were aristocrats, athletes, and so on. Auden's parents, it said, were Welsh squires, and we were all of exalted birth. Of course there was no word of truth in these attacks, in fact there was no fact at all in the whole article that was not invented. In any case, the facts, even if true, would to most people have seemed irrelevant. But not to this essayist. His business was to prove that we were aristocrats, and then to show that our verse was counter-revolutionary. His humble duty was to discredit us, and that he performed, quite regardless of any sense of truth. In Russia, a few years ago, such attacks were a commonplace, and there was no appeal against them.

Against this, one must set some statements by writers and critics in *Literature of the Peoples of the U S S R*, Vols. 7-8. Some of the declarations here seem admirable and honest. For instance, A. Selivenovsky, in an essay on the *Poetry of Socialism*, says: 'To become an artist of socialism means, if you come from the intelligentsia, that not only must you be convinced that the ideas of socialism are correct, but that you must alter your previously-formed poetic style. It means that you must overcome and discard many of your former ideas about life: you must change your way of looking at the world. But this alteration does not imply, of course, that the subject-matter, imagery, and style of the poet of socialism is made to lose all individuality, is reduced to complete uniformity. This is far from the case. The fact is that it is socialism that ensures the all-round development and growth of the human individual.'

This seems to me excellent. Good too is V. Kaverin's essay on literature and science, in which he pleads for a more scientific subject-matter in modern literature. C. Zelinsky is narrower. 'Criticism acquires a function of

a principally intellectual-educational order to struggle against the heritage of capitalism and consciousness by exposing it in art.' However, he has hard, almost sinister things to say of Voronsky, a figure of the recent past 'Voronsky based his conception of art on the works of Tolstoy and Proust, writers' in whose work direct observation is most prominent. In such a system of views, however, the very core of the Marxian conception of literature, its very heart, class activity, was lost. It was not by chance, therefore, that Voronsky proved to be allied with Trotskyism.'

Even officially, the position of literature in Communist society is extremely controversial. All I want to emphasize here is that if one is on the side of the greatest possible degree of freedom, if one insists that one should write as one cares and about what one wishes, one is not a traitor to the Socialist cause. No system is complete in itself as a solution of the bad system which it supersedes. If there is to be any sort of freedom or improvement, one has got to push and even sometimes fight the systems one most approves of. Unless artists insist on their right to criticize, to be human, and even 'humanitarian,' Communism will become a frozen era, another ice age.

Lastly, the view of Lenin was not at all that of a bureaucrat. Polonsky, in his *Outline of the Literary Movement of the Revolutionary Epoch*, relates how he pencilled comments on an article of Pletnev, *On the Ideological Front*, which was printed in *Pravda*, Sept. 27th, 1922.<sup>1</sup> "The creation of a new proletarian *class* culture is the fundamental goal of the Proletcult," wrote Pletnev. "Ha, Ha!" There are many other comments and remarks, such as "human!" and "What a mess!" surviving. In two places he writes "Bunk."

<sup>1</sup> Polonsky's article forms an appendix to Max Eastman's book

#### XIV

### UPWARD, KAFKA AND VAN DER POST

IT would be irrelevant here to attempt any survey of Communist literature. An enormous wealth of such literature exists, mostly with a proletarian subject-matter, but in an extremely old-fashioned style and frame-work. In the case of Russian literature this reversion, not to the style of the Russian classics, but to the styles of the *feuilleton* and the thriller, may be necessary, since the phase of literary experiment hardly at any moment affected the audience for which these new artists are writing: it concerned only an audience of writers. The starting-point for the writer who wishes to reach a large working-class audience is not Proust, nor even Tolstoy, it is, at worst, *The Happy Magazine*, and at best, Gorky, in his most tramping moods.

Anyone who is interested in the subject will find plenty of exceptions to my generalizations: particularly in the novels of Ehrenbourg, Gladkov, and Romanov. But here I am primarily concerned with the 'highbrow' literature of young English Communists. This is not in any sense proletarian: it is advance-guard experimental writing imbued with Communist ideology. I am thinking here particularly of some of Auden's poems (for example, of *The Dance of Death*), of the anthologies *New Signatures* and *New Country*, and in particular of Edward Upward's two short stories in *New Country*. As interesting are several books, which although not Communist in tendency,

have as their subjects Communism or working-class movements. One of the most interesting proletarian novels of the last few years is *Losing*, by Henry Green, a book that seems to have been almost neglected. Pomeroy's novel, *The Invaders*, which I have already discussed, also qualifies as a proletarian novel.

The two works which I am going to discuss in this chapter seem to me particularly significant, because the one (Edward Upward's story) is, from the Communist standpoint, ideologically correct; the other, Van der Post's novel, *In a Province*, because it is a serious political novel which is a complete refutation of the revolutionary tactics of Communists.

cause they want the town to have a good name with visitors. That's what civic consciousness really means, and it's a perfectly sound business proposition, I suppose.'

Like most moderns, Upward's hero is well soaked in what Cambridge dons (the more advanced ones) call 'contemporary sensibility.' He is nervy, and unsure of his own inner self when he looks beyond himself, he receives the authentic, guaranteed *Waste Land* reactions, 'a sense of desolation, of uncertainty, futility.'

'I am going back to my lodgings for lunch. Who will be there?' Only the table, the flower with protruding stamens arching from its jug like a sabre-toothed tiger, the gloss of custard, pleated apple-green satin behind the fretwork *fleur-de-lys* panel of the piano. The whole afternoon and evening will be free. Realize that, realize what I could do. All the possibilities of thinking and feeling, exploration and explanation and vision, walking in history as among iron and alabaster and domes, focusing the unity of the superseded with the superseding, recognizing the future, vindicating the poets, retiring between pillars as Socrates, desperate as Spartacus, emerging with Lenin, foreseeing the greatest of all eras. But unless I am very careful I shall sit on the sofa trying not to go on reading the paper.'

This is beautifully observed and written. After noticing this, the sureness of structure and clearness of vision, one notices that there is after all a great difference in the attitude of this man, and the attitude say, of Prufrock, or any of the heroes of James. In the first place, he is neither of those exaggerated modern types, the 'special case,' the man of enormous sensibility who does nothing but feel and be 'extraordinary,' and the ordinary case, the bank clerk, who is very dull but feels a lot just the same. He is a man who knows exactly his

place in society, and has neither an exaggerated sense of his importance, nor his unimportance. He is more in the position of Prufrock than of a James hero (or heroine, like the post-office girl of *In the Cage*), but if one compares him with Prufrock, one instantly notices an aspect of Prufrock that is not apparent. Prufrock is, in fact, rather pleased with himself at being such a roneant. There is an air almost of self-congratulation about such lines as these:

'No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be,  
 Am an attendant 'ord, one that will do  
 To swell a progress, start a scene or two,  
 Advise the prince, no doubt, an easy tool,  
 Deferential, glad to be of use,  
 Polite, cautious, and meticulous,  
 Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse,  
 At times indeed, almost ridiculous—  
 Almost, at times, the Fool '

that he is such a vastly superior sensibility that he does not really *want* to do anything

Now I believe that one of the healthier symptoms of some recent writing is a reaction from this insidious self-congratulation. Compare Upward's story with a passage from W. H. Auden's *Airman's Journal* in *The Orators*

'I know that I am I, living in a small way in a temperate zone, blaming father, jealous of son, confined to a few acts often repeated, easily attracted to a limited class of physique, yet envying the simple life of the gut, desiring the certainty of the breast or prison, happiest sawing wood, only knowledge of the real disturbances in the general law of the dream, the quick blood fretting against the slowness of the hope, a unit of life, needing water and salt, that looks for a sign'

This is the attitude of a person who is able to accept himself at the estimate which society has of him. Humility of this sort is necessary to any writer who wishes to have a political understanding of our time. For the extremes of egotism, whether they are megalomaniac, or self-debasing, thrust him back upon himself: they are the 'personified ideal'

Upward's hero goes on to consider the various attitudes which he may take up to the duplicator

'I can't just forbid myself to be seriously interested in the success or failure of the copies, and then, if they fail, highmindedly submit to a thrashing from a slave-owner. No one would attempt to thrash or torture me, I should simply be asked to find another job. Things may have been different under the feudal barons. Then you were someone's property and you might be thrashed but you wouldn't be abandoned. That's what gave colour to the God the Father theory'

He reflects that he is not one of the responsible classes, one of the 'liars and twisters' 'I am much nearer to those other blunderers who, cynically regarding as a dishonour and a horror the work they have to do every day, try to preserve the old integrity intact within the blind enclosure of their minds That is the maddest mistake of all.

'It is mad to be content to hate every external danger, to be an ostrich, to accept any explanation which minimizes the importance of material gains or losses, to fail to try and find a real solution It's no use pretending you are splendidly or redeemingly or even interestingly doomed.'

I quote extensively, because what the hero of the story is criticizing is really a whole cultural attitude: it is the attitude of many of the writers whom I have been discussing in this book those who try to preserve the old integrity, who considered themselves interestingly doomed

In the same way<sup>1</sup> as Lawrence, when the heroes of his stories reject the ideal of love, himself rejects that attitude as a creative attitude for his fiction, so Upward rejects the attitudes of being an ostrich or preserving one's individual integrity What this story reflects is in fact a changed consciousness towards politics.

The man in his momentous walk through the park has his authentic vision as significant in its way as the vision of the hero of *The Ambassadors*, in another more aristocratic garden The message which Strether delivered on the earlier occasion, was 'Live, live!' The vision in *Sunday* is one of the purpose in history.

'But history will not always be living here It will not always wear these sordid and trashy clothes History abandoned the brutal fatherliness of the castle, and it



will abandon Sunday and the oppression of the office too. It will go to live elsewhere. It is going already to live with the enemies of suffering, of suffering beside which yours shows like silly hysteria, with people who are not content to suppress misery in their minds but are going to destroy the more obvious material causes of misery in the world.'

The story ends with a personal decision of the man who is thinking these thoughts. 'He will go to the small club behind the Gaiety Café. He will ask whether there is a meeting to-night. At first he will be regarded with suspicion, even taken for a police spy. And quite rightly. He will have to prove himself, to prove that he isn't a mere neurotic, an untrustworthy freak. It will take time. But it is the only hope. He will at least have made a start.'

This story is remarkable, because it shows that it is possible for a writer to create by going forward into a new tradition, as well as going back, like Eliot in *The Rock*, into an old one. Upward has a political or moral or sociological vision which is as remarkable as that of Franz Kafka: the forces which he symbolizes seem so clear that they convince us even more than the realities which symbolize them. Another story called *The Colleagues*, also published in *New Country*, is an account of the authentic vision of a young school-master standing in the preparatory school playground and watching his colleagues punt a ball.

'Lloyd has regathered the ball. He's perfectly aware that I'm watching. Receiving a long pass and holding it neatly he began to run. He swerved, sold the dummy, fended off a tackle, punted over the head of the full-back. Knee up, rigid, a clean full punch with the instep. He sprang, he raced towards the tennis courts. Bucking,

heavily agile, with jerking shoulders Baboon or antelope  
 Going all out, broad-backed in a tight sweater How  
 terrific. How electrically vile. He plunged, he touched  
 down, stumbling among tree roots. It's a vision I am  
 palpably standing here. There are no other witnesses  
 If there were they would have nothing to report except  
 that a young preparatory school-master has kicked a  
 football I have seen a horror which no one else would  
 have been privileged to see For an instant I must have  
 been authentically insane Bunyan saw mountains shin-  
 ing over the houses I've had an hallucination Probably  
 voluntary It's a reward. It's going to happen again  
 In the night At lunch Everywhere. An award of  
 power This is only the beginning A genuinely religious  
 delusion. I am very glad.'

The last two sentences are extremely important, for  
 the most significant fact about Upward's two stories is  
 that they are religious The visionary conviction can  
 only be described as religious, and the complete and quiet  
 solution of *Sunday*—to go to the meetings at the club  
 behind the Geisha Café—is the religious resolve to par-  
 take in some ritual. Again his vision of his enemy is  
 religious He sees his enemy in Hell, as an external and  
 hated object, not as a projected element of himself.  
 Stylistically and in his attitude, Upward resembles, and  
 perhaps owes much to, Kafka Kafka has the same vision  
 of authority. but he is in doubt whether the authority  
 is purposive. he is only certain that it is real There is  
 no solution in Kafka, and for that reason his stories  
 are always inconclusive *The Castle* is unfinished, be-  
 cause there could be no conclusion to it What is  
 established is that the power which directs the village  
 from the Castle above it is authoritative and undisputed.  
 but whether it is inane or sensible is unknowable. The

peculiar fascination of Kafka is that he is a visionary who doubted his own visions. the vision is completely convincing and overwhelming, but, unlike any other visionary, he questions his vision. The mere flooding conviction of authority in the universe is not enough, if the power seems wasted, untidy and purposeless. His vision of society is built around the sense of authority pervading the whole life. For example, there is his legend of *The Great Wall of China*.

'Fifty years before the first stone was laid the art of architecture, and especially that of masonry, had been proclaimed as the most important branch of knowledge throughout the whole area of a China that was to be walled round, and all other arts gained recognition only in so far as they had reference to it. I can still remember quite well us standing as small children, scarcely sure on our feet, in our teacher's garden, and being ordered to build a sort of wall out of pebbles and then the teacher, girding up his robe, ran full tilt against the wall, of course knocking it down, and scolded us so terribly for the shoddiness of our work that we ran weeping in all directions to our parents. A trivial incident, but significant of the spirit of the time.'

The nausea and despair which is the core of his work is revealed in a later passage

'In the office of the command—where it was and who sat there no one whom I have asked knew then or knows now—in that office one may be certain that all human thoughts and desires were revolved, and counter to them all human aims and fulfilments. And through the window the reflected splendours of divine worlds fell on the hands of the leaders as they traced their plans.'

The centre of this society, existing and elaborately organized, with a complete system of morality functioning

only to promote the existence of one external aim—a Wall—is then a blank—a pious hope, a wish, a poem. Here one sees that Kafka has, more than any other writer, plunged into the destructive element: his vision of society is authoritative, ironically religious, and nihilist. Upward in his stories offers a solution to the question that Kafka could not answer, by replying that the purpose of social morality is the transformation of society itself, a historic act of the will, the volition of 'people who are not content to suppress misery in their minds but are going to destroy the more obvious material causes of misery in the world'.

Laurens van der Post's novel is a book of a kind which will be more familiar to most readers. It is a biographical study of a young Dutchman, Johan van Bredepoel. The book opens with an account of his first serious illness, when he is twenty-five years old. We are evidently at a turning-point of his life, but we are not asked to consider the years that follow this illness, but his childhood and his youthful experiences which precede it. However, it is very important that the book opens with this illness, because it crystallizes the experiences of all his past life, amounting to a mental struggle which was doomed to express itself in a crisis of the body.

The scene of the book now shifts to the past, logically enough, because the explanation of the illness lies in the past. We are given an account of his home, of his puritanical Boer upbringing, of how he is taught to despise the coloured people. However, there are already rifts in his complacency, intuitions which disturb him, which do not fit into his surroundings but suggest a more consistent future. For example, there is the occasion when his tutor, Meneer Broecksma, finds his diary, and starts a discussion which finally shocks his pupil.

Have you so little appetite for life in you? Tell

me, for instance, haven't you noticed what a good figure that girl Johanna has? I bet you haven't! but just look at her, there's something for you to write about'

'But, Menecr Broecksma!' Johan exclaimed, overcome with surprise 'She's black!'

'Black! Of course she's black, I'm not blind,' the old man replied more warmly than seemed necessary 'But that doesn't make any difference to the fact that she is very beautiful It's necessary to have grown up in this awful country not to have seen that Every time I look at her, I feel that we lose a hell of a lot by being civilized Look at her yourself and be inspired!'

Subsequently his tutor was dismissed and Johan knew that the reason was his admiration of the black girl These things left a deep impression on his puzzled mind It was not, however, until he moved to the town of Port Benjamin that he became really interested in the lives of the black people His interest was partly a reaction from his disgust at the lives of the white people, the inhabitants of his boarding-house, 'Eagle's Nest' In particular, he became friendly with a young negro, Kenon, who was a servant in the boarding-house He used to give Kenon money to send each month to his parents The effect of Port Benjamin on Kenon was disastrous He became drugged and overwhelmed by the life of cheap cinemas and brothels He was sent to prison for six months for becoming involved in a fight which took place at a brothel, and for being drunk.

In this book, the unhappy life of Kenon becomes, as it were, a projection of Johan's interest in politics The seriousness of this one case makes him realize the whole racial problem, and at the same time it expresses the depth of his realization On the one hand, he is an exile from the whites, who regard him as a traitor, on

the other hand, he is involved in a terrible spiritual struggle with the communist agitator, Burgess. This struggle has its own violent projections, culminating in a riot, for which Burgess is responsible, and in which some of the natives whom he has enlisted are killed. Kenon is one of those who are shot.

The book would not be so living if van Bredepoel, because he is the central character who is struggling to achieve a balance of opposing forces, were himself portrayed as balanced and perfect. He is a rather weak man, who is extremely unwilling to be drawn into affairs which are not his own. In him this is culpable, because it amounts to a refusal to recognize his real interests in life, since he is interested in justice and freedom. Nothing shows this more clearly than his relationship with Kenon, for whom he has a feeling amounting to love. Yet one feels that his love for Kenon is primarily a moral rather than a sexual feeling or to put this in another way, his dissatisfaction with the society in which he is living has thwarted the normal outlet for his love, which has emerged in this spiritualized homosexual form. His childhood experiences and the incident of the black girl now take on a new aspect, for one sees that they amounted to a realization that his whole environment was false, that his parents' happiness was based on false assumptions and an easy acceptance of injustice.

Van Bredepoel's weakness is demonstrated by his treatment of Kenon. Although he behaves generously to the native, on two or three occasions he omits to act when by acting strongly he might have saved Kenon. He has, however, a power of reflexion, of regarding himself objectively, and of learning from his own experiences, which sometimes atones for weakness of action: an ability to discuss things and accept criticism.

which is not possible to stronger characters, who dare not admit any criticism which might thwart them. The sociological and moral questions of the book might be re-stated on another plane by asking whether van Bredepoel is weak or strong. for if he was able to form a synthesis of his conflicting experiences, it is difficult to dismiss him as weak

This book ends, as I have said, with a description of a riot, in which the police break up a meeting organized by Burgess. The tall, thin, nervous, consumptive, idealistic agitator, Burgess, is one of the best characters in the book. It is this riot which resolves Johan van Bredepoel. Afterwards, Burgess is still talking about his 'benighted system,' although he himself is as responsible as anyone for Kenon's death. Johan turns on him.

'It's the system, always the system, and yet again the system, for you. You are always beating your wings against the system. I'm sick of hearing about the system. The system is only an approximation, a reflexion of the rules that govern the little acts of each one of us. Only it's an approximation so big that if you place all the emphasis on it, the individual loses the sense of the responsibility for his little share in it. It seems to me fatal. The starting- and finishing-point is in the heart of each man. At one time the responsibility for action was placed on the individual, and I think the world was relatively a good deal happier. But to-day, if a man is a thief or a murderer, we no longer blame the man, we blame his environment. If a man is poor and hasn't enough to eat, we don't say that he has been lazy or has made no consistent effort to better himself, we blame the system. If a man rapes a woman, or walks down the street and opens his fly to a crowd, we don't blame his lack of self-control, we say, "What can you expect of a

system which forces such terrible sex-taboos on us?" It's always the system. Even scientists and philosophers have rushed in to help people like you. Man, they tell you, is only a machine, put him in a certain environment and he must react in a definite and calculable way. He cannot help himself, only his conditioned reflexes can. And what conditions these reflexes? Environment. Oh yes! The ground has been well ploughed! You have all the rationalization for your attacks on the system that you can want. Only man is losing the sense of his integrity, the sense of his responsibility to himself. He is already, for you, someone who can be improved merely by increasing his income. Everyone wants to improve the system under which he lives and not himself, and as he, or a collection of people like him, make the system, it all ends in no improvement, no responsibility. Take you yourself. What have you done this afternoon? I haven't heard you utter a word of reproach against your share in it, all you've done is to come back howling about the system again!"

He goes on

'Listen, the unjust man, the selfish man, the cruel man, will act always according to his lights. The system is only a garment round the human heart, it does not give shape to the heart, it takes its own shape from the heart. I agree with you that some garments fit better than others, but yours seems to me not a garment but a strait-jacket, which man will have to burst if he is to survive. Under your system the just will still be just, the unjust still unjust, we will be no farther forward, and you'll have put the world through a period of bloodshed and anarchy in vain. Your enemy and mine in this country is not the system but the heart of every white man. You can't legislate a man's heart away.'



Laurens van der Post's novel seems to me particularly relevant to my discussion, because it is a book which has as its subject revolutionary politics, but which is not propagandist. It is scarcely necessary to point out that to any Communist this book would seem counter-revolutionary, and that in Russia it would presumably be banned. The vice of revolutionary literature is not the material which it takes as its subject-matter—that is its greatest virtue—but that it permits only one interpretation of that material. One can quite well imagine how a Communist writer would have dealt with van der Post's material. The moment Johan came into contact with Burgess, all sense of inquiry and speculation would have been abandoned, Burgess would have been accepted as an angel and van Bredepoe] would have become his ally. Kenon would have been glorified as a martyr of the revolution, and Johan would have been able to congratulate himself on helping his friend along the road towards such a glorious death.

The fact is that to make this a propagandist novel, van der Post would have had to make assumptions which are destructive to art. These assumptions all amount to an assertion of knowledge that the writer does not possess, and which the reader knows he does not possess. It is destructive for an artist to say that he knows something which he only believes or hopes to be true. For example, to say that I am on the side of the proletariat, that I shall fight for their cause, may be just. To say that the proletariat is better than any other class, that the proletarian revolution is the historical future of the world, is to blind myself as an artist. It is the business of artists to insist on human values. If there is need for a revolution, it is these human values that will make the revolution.

## THE AIRMAN, POLITICS AND PSYCHO-ANALYSIS

I HAVE suggested, in the previous chapter, by quoting van der Post's novel, that one way of testing the value of a possible Communist literature is by considering not what is contained under that heading, but what is excluded from it. One sees then how narrow and sectarian a basis Communism as a creative philosophy may become, and one begins to understand the difficulty of the writers who organized the persecutions of RAPP. For clearly, if there is a Communist way in which van der Post should have written his book, it is inadmissible that he should write it in any other way. This would be, I suppose, the point of view of a Soviet writer. But there are many other examples. If the reader is interested in Communist art, he should consider, in the course of his daily reading, how many statements on the problems of contemporary life which he reads would seem heresy to the ideal anti-religious, proletarian artist. For example, when I was thinking a good deal of these matters I copied out into a notebook the following from C. G. Jung's *The Secret of the Golden Flower*

'Only on the basis of an attitude which renounces none of the values won in the course of Christian development, but which, on the contrary, tries with Christian charity and forbearance to accept the humblest things in oneself, will a higher level of consciousness and culture be possible.'

Now I found myself in entire agreement with this, nor

would I feel able to reject it because I felt it did not fit in with a system of thought of which I in some respects approved.

A few days later I read the following sonnet, by Cecil Day Lewis

'Yes, why do we all, seeing a communist, feel small? That small

Catspaw ruffles our calm—how comes it? That touch of storm

Brewing, shivers the torches even in this vault? And the shame

Unsettles a high esteem? Here it is There fall From him shadows of what he is building, bold and tall—

For his sun has barely mastered the misted horizon —they seem

Indeed he casts a shadow, as among the dead will some Living one It is the future walking to meet us all

Mark him He is only what we are, mortal Yet from the night

Of history, where we lie dreaming still, he is wide awake

Weak, liable to ill-luck—yet rock where we are slight Eddies, and amid us islands the spring tide beginning to make

Mark him, workers, and all who wish the world aright—

He is what your sons will be, the road these times must take'

'Why do we all, seeing a Communist, feel small?' the writer asks, and he goes on to explain that the 'catspaw ruffles our calm,' and the 'touch of storm brewing, shiver the torches even in this vault'

My own feeling on reading this poem was that for some reason the poet is afraid of Communists, and that he wants to communicate this fear to the reader. but that as long as he and the reader are afraid, they are in no position to answer such questions. The poem has the vice of puritanism: it establishes a strong sense of guilt (the reader is guilty because he is not small like the Communist catspaw, he is living in a vault; he holds himself too much in esteem, he is not building a new world), then, after convincing the reader of his inferiority, it seeks to convince him of a superstition: that the Communist (who after all, though, is only mortal) is a rock, is wide awake to the purpose of history.

This poem does not seem to me to compare with other poems by Day Lewis, because a system of thought predominates, and crushes out the spontaneous thought and sympathy of the writer. If one looks at the poem again one sees that even the Communist does not come very well out of it: we are assured that he too is mortal, weak, liable to ill-luck. The poem now seems to say that he is really the same as we are, but is superior in having submitted himself to this ideological system which tells him what the future is going to be, and the roads these times must take. In other words, it tells him all sorts of things which he doesn't really know, and which the writer doesn't know either, but which he thinks he ought to know.

My argument is that as a man of action it may be necessary to assume this knowledge, but that as an artist, it is not only wrong, it is impossible to do so. It may be necessary for the purposes of organization and confidence that revolutionary workers should adopt a belief which tells them quite positively certain things about the future. But the point is that it is not really true that people

know these things, and it is the business of the artist to know it is not true. If a little bird is paralysed with conviction that in ten minutes' time a very nice serpent which has just looked his way is going to eat him, there ought to be one minute centre of the bird's consciousness that is aware of a million other possibilities (however much he wants to be eaten), and that centre is the artistic consciousness. Day Lewis's poem describes the attitudes of the little bird and the serpent, but somehow the impersonal, ultimately indifferent consciousness has got left out of it.

For ultimately, however interested the writer may be as a person, as an artist he has got to be indifferent to all but what is objectively true. The road the future will tread may be the road of Communism, but the road of the artist will always be some way infinitely more difficult than one which is laid down in front of him.

It seems likely, then, that the Communist explanation of our society is not adequate to produce considerable art: it is adequate only to use art to serve its own purposes. The real objection to the Communist ideology in writing is that it is not self-critical. All it demands from a writer is that he should be a good and explicit exponent of Communism: if he is that, it not only shields him from criticism, there is positively no ground on which it can criticize him. When Communists, in *New Masses*, and *International Literature*, criticize proletarian literature, they are always safe when they can attack the writer ideologically.<sup>1</sup> If the writer is ideologically sound, they express the most naïve surprise that his book is not readable,

<sup>1</sup> *The New Republic* quotes a criticism of a book of pictures by Soglow which begins 'Whether it is humor or not, depends entirely on the class point of view. There is no such thing as humor in general, humor is for one class or another. The question is whether the book is satire for the working class or superficial cartoons to amuse the well-to-do.'



primarily the mind of the individual or a collection of individuals, and not the economic interests which direct individuals as though they were merely cogs in an economic machine. Psychologists regard war as an outbreak of passions which are repressed by the ordinary conditions of modern society. When Freud lectured in Vienna during the war, he took this view of the war, referring to aspects of it as examples of the kind of mass neurosis which he had discovered in individual patients. The subject has been discussed here in a book by Dr. Glover, on *War, Sadism and Pacifism* and Aldous Huxley gave a lecture on the wireless in which he quoted statistics to prove that during the war there was a smaller proportion of suicides in the countries of Europe, including the neutral countries, than in peace time. It is no part of my business to enter into this discussion now. All it is necessary to show is that there is another, a psychological explanation, of the war. Even if we believe Dr. Glover is wrong, or that it is impossible to probe, in our present state of ignorance, into the true psychological causes of the war, the knowledge that such causes do exist, and the view that war may be regarded as a disease of our particular civilization, suggest a strong criticism of the purely economic explanation, or the explanation in terms of class war. What Dr. Glover goes on to say (as quoted by Huxley in his talk) is that, after fifty years of research, it might be possible to cure man of the desire to express himself by fighting. This suggestion is, again, a criticism of the technique of revolution, for it suggests two questions. (1) Can you impose a cure on the capitalist world by making a revolution? (2) Since revolution is itself a form of fighting, does it not necessarily defeat its own ends?

Here, then, are two entirely different ways of looking

at society. The one is that society is composed of a whole divided vertically into different competing imperialist units, which are divided again horizontally by class differences. The other regards society as a collection of individuals whose consciousness is a small light in the vast field of the unconscious being. Whereas Communism lays great emphasis on the will, psycho-analysis doubts the blind will's effectiveness, regards the will, indeed, as dangerous and liable to destructive misuses, and emphasizes the importance of patience and rational understanding. Psycho-analysis may admit, in certain circumstances, that class war exists, but it cannot accept the assertion that the class of beings who are labelled 'bourgeois' or 'capitalist' or 'rentier' are fundamentally different from their neighbours, and only existing as objects to be destroyed. Nevertheless, the ideals of a classless society, and of an equal distribution of wealth, both appeal to the psychologist. The great division of Communism from all other creeds is that in it ends have been made equivalent with means, the method has deliberately been turned into the creed.

Now the political artist, the artist who wishes to write about society as a whole, and not about the individual severed from his background, is aware of these two ways of thinking, the socialist and the psychological, which greatly influence our modern political consciousness.

What happens if, instead of being a propagandist for either point of view, he attempts a synthesis: an understanding of the war, for example, which is in both economic and psychological terms; or such an understanding of the post-war world?

In the work of W. H. Auden one sees such a synthesis attempted.

The world in which a great deal of Auden's poetry



moves is that of the psychologist's and doctor's case book. I have selected quite at random two quotations from an article by A. E. Clark-Kennedy, on *Acquired Disorders of Function*, in the *Post-Graduate Medical Journal*, to illustrate the use of a language which is primarily jargon.

'Loss of appetite, indigestion and sleeplessness serve no useful purpose in sorrow, anxiety and fear.'

'An acquired disorder of function may be recognized by the fact that symptoms occur as an immediate consequence in the change of external environment, such as the presence of a horse, or the advent of the pollen season.'

A great deal of the imagery in Auden's poetry has the same kind of clinical significance as the images suggested by such a phrase as 'the presence of a horse and the advent of the pollen season,' in Clark-Kennedy's account of environments producing symptoms of hay-fever. For this reason, Auden's imagery has the immediacy of imagery recollected in dreams, and the vividness of certain types of neurotic behaviour.

'Sir, no man's enemy, forgiving all  
 But will his negative inversion, be prodigal.  
 Send to us power and light, a sovereign touch  
 Curing the intolerable neural itch,  
 The exhaustion of weaning, the liar's quinsy,  
 And the distortions of ingrown virginity  
 Prohibit sharply the rehearsed response  
 And gradually correct the coward's stance,  
 Cover in time with beams those in retreat  
 That, spotted, they turn though the reverse were great,  
 Publish each healer that in city lives  
 Or country houses at the end of drives,  
 Harrow the house of the dead, look shining at  
 New styles of architecture, a change of heart'

When he writes such a line as 'rise in the wind, my great big serpent,' one is aware that the sexual imagery is conscious. The consciousness of imagery affects all his poetry. In the same way as Jean Cocteau in his *Orphée* renewed the imagery for death, supplying death with a surgeon's gloves and all the apparatus of the operating theatre, so Auden has renewed the whole stock of his poetic imagery. To do this, he has not only invented, he has also plagiarized on a heroic scale. He has ransacked Jazz songs (such as Cole Porter's *Let's fall in love*, or Gershwin's *My one and only*), psychological and medical text-books, and films, for his material. His material is not, of course, these things in themselves, but the minds of the people who are affected by them. A verse like

'You were a great Cunarder, I  
 Was only a fishing smack  
 Once you passed across my bows,  
 And of course you did not look back  
 It was only a single moment, yet  
 I watch the sea and sigh  
 Because my heart can never forget  
 The day you passed me by,'

is an extension of the method used by Joyce in *Ulysses* when he makes Bloom think in journalese (complete with headlines), during the scene in the newspaper office. But in these lines Auden has taken the method a stage further than Joyce for not only is the chorus satiric, and a parody, but it has a third quite unexpected element of seriousness in it: a true emotional, but rather pathetic, content which makes one reflect that it is a transcription, in contemporary imagery, of a genuine love lyric of a simple ballad kind.

On the one hand, then, there is this psychological aspect of Auden's poetry. To put this in the simplest terms, he is here engaged in extending the tradition of English poetry to his vast new clinical subject-matter. But, primarily, the emotions are, in his work, presented in simplified terms. For that reason he has gone back to early English poetry, to plays like *Everyman*, and to the Anglo-Saxon sagas, for his tradition. The Anglo-Saxon influence is shown in the definitions of the *Airman's Alphabet*—for example

‘WIRELESS    sender of signal  
                   and speaker of sorrow  
                   and news from nowhere  
 ZERO        Love before leaving  
                   and touch of terror  
                   and time of attack ’

Again, this influence is shown when he turns to a simplified presentation of experience, of love or death

‘To-night the many come to mind  
 Sent forward in the thaw with anxious marrow  
 For such might now return with a bleak face,  
 An image pause half-lighted in the door,  
 A greater but not fortunate in all ’

Or, again, from the last chorus from the same charade,  
*Paid on Both Sides*

‘His fields are used up where the moles visit,  
 The contours worn flat, if there show  
 Passage for water he will miss it  
  
 Give up his breath, his woman, his team,  
 No life to touch, though later there be  
 Big fruit, eagles above the stream ’

This also recalls the last chorus of Yeats's version of Sophocles' *Œdipus Rex*:

'Make way for Œdipus. All people said,  
"That is a fortunate man";  
And now what storms are beating on his head!  
Call no man fortunate that is not dead  
The dead are free from pain.'

In such lines as those from the *canzone*, Auden is not merely expressing a desire to escape from the present into archaic forms of experience: he is asserting the memory of actual racial experiences, in the unconscious mind. His poems are full of such references to racial memory as.

'Shall memory restore  
The steps and the shore,  
The face and the meeting-place;  
Shall the bird live,  
Shall the fish drive,  
And sheep obey  
In a sheep's way;  
Can love remember  
The question and the answer,  
For love recover  
What has been dark and rich and warm all over?'

The symbols here are not literary: they are symbols of a deeper state of consciousness, still existing in the unconscious mind. This is a primitive consciousness, not a literary consciousness, which Eliot appeals to in his poetry.

'Lady of silences  
 Calm and distressed  
 Torn and most whole  
 Rose of memory  
 Rose of forgetfulness  
 Exhausted and life-giving  
 Worried reposeful  
 The single Rose  
 Is now the Garden  
 Where all loves end '

Auden's poetry is made complex, because not only is this analytic account of the collective unconscious presented in his poetry, but, after that, there is a further problem of presentation a political view of our society is also presented In the early poems, this view of our civilization seems to owe much to *The Waste Land* In many of the poems there are pictures of a civilization in decay

'Financier, leaving your little room  
 Where the money is made, but not spent,  
 You'll need your typist and your boy no more,  
 The game is up for you and for the others,  
 Who, thinking, pace in slippers on the lawns  
 Of college Quad or Cathedral Close,  
 Who are born nurses, who live in shorts,  
 Sleeping with people and playing fives

You cannot be away, then, no  
 Not though you pack to leave within an hour,  
 Escaping humming down arterial roads  
 The date was yours, the prey to fugues,



logical nature of illness Auden's poetry is full of references to illness, to nurses, to people who are wheeled about in bath-chairs, these illnesses are always interpreted as symptoms of a state of mind.

'For to be held for friend  
By an undeveloped mind  
To be joke for children is  
Death's happiness.

Whose anecdotes betray  
His favourite colour as blue  
Colour of distant bells  
And boys' overalls

His tales of the bad lands  
Disturb the sewing hands,  
Hard to be superior  
On parting nausea,

To accept the cushions from  
Women against martyrdom  
Yet applauding the circuits  
Of racing cyclists '

To realize how important is this view of illness in his poetry, it is necessary to examine *The Orators*, where the view of illness as a psychological defect, and the view of a certain class of people as psychologically ill, are both expressed. The subject is announced in the question 'What do you think about England, this country of ours, where nobody is well?'

Those sections of *The Orators* called *Letter to a Wound* and *The Airman's Journal* are in some ways comparable to Rilke's *Notebook of Malte Laurids Brigge*. It is hardly necessary to point out that Rilke's *Notebook*

is largely autobiographical, and that where it is fictitious it creates, as does *The Hermit's Journal*, a personal legend. Rilke shared Auden's view of the psychological nature of illness. The views of both writers is, to summarize it crudely, that illness of the body is the physical expression of a defect of the mind: thus it is to be regarded with relief as a recognizable symptom, or even in some cases with gratitude as an effective cure, or as a means by which, through treatment of the body, a complicated illness of the mind may be relieved.

Rilke—or Briggé—describes himself as suffering from an illness all the symptoms of which are purely mental, and yet it is an illness for the cure of which he goes to the ordinary Paris hospital.

'And now this malady, which has always affected me so strangely. I am sure its importance is minimized, just as the importance of other diseases is exaggerated. This disease has no particular characteristics; it takes on those of the person it attacks. With a somnambulist assurance it drags from the profoundest depths of each one's being a danger that seemed past, and sets it before him again, quite near, imminent. Men, who once in their school-days attempted the helpless vice that has for its duped partner the poor, hard hands of boys, find themselves tempted afresh by it; or an illness they had conquered in childhood recurs in them; or a lost habit reappears, a certain hesitating turn of the head that had been peculiar to them years before.'<sup>1</sup>

This illness is certainly a relative—a poor relative—of the illness in the *Letter to a Woman*.

Rilke's Journal and his poetry are preoccupied with death. His view of death corresponds to his—and

<sup>1</sup> *The Notebook of Male Lucide Briggé*, translated by John Linton (Hogarth Press), p. 59





Peter Pannishness, it was not a narcissistic desire to recover lost charms and innocence and lack of responsibility. On the contrary, it expressed rather the desire we find in Yeats to create a legend, and the desire we find in Eliot to recover a tradition. In the *Notebook* the legend and the tradition to some extent overlap, because he invents ancestors and family history. Nevertheless, the tradition was undoubtedly very real to him, since he himself came of a partly aristocratic family: and what is more natural than it should be immersed in legend—even if the legend was deliberately exploited from memories of childhood?

Rilke's family memories correspond to the airman's worship of his dead uncle in *The Airman's Journal*. This tradition is linked up, too, with the airman's childhood.

'He (my uncle) didn't come very often, but I can remember when I was about thirteen a letter from him coming at breakfast. "Of course, I know he's very clever," my mother sniffed, and then there was silence

'It wasn't till I was sixteen and a half that he invited me to his flat. We had champagne for dinner. When I left I knew who and what he was—my real ancestor.'

Rilke, in his journal—like all the great æsthetes like Joyce, and Henry James, and the early Yeats—is occupied in his art with the problems of individuals. The æsthetic fulfilment of the individual soul is what occupies him, as apart from the personal salvation which concerns Eliot, or the personal damnation of Baudelaire. In Auden's work the emphasis is quite different: the interest is the relation of the individual to society, the individual who is not anti-social and a secret rebel, an anarchist, in the sense in which all the great æsthetes have been so, but who, if he is a rebel, is only that in conjunction with a social class.

Therefore the main interest of *The Airman's Journal* is how the airman is able to relate himself to society, and how far he is himself simply a product of the social life which has produced him.

The symbolic position of the airman is, as it were, to be on the margin of civilization. Being an airman, it is obvious that he is not tied down in any way, he is up in the air, and in the position of artists like Rilke or Lawrence who travel, and yet he is the man of action flying, planning Fascist (?) coups, circulating leaflets.

It is important to realize that this particular airman is not only an airman with an aeroplane, but he is a psychological airman as well. He has another mythology besides the ancestral relationship with his uncle. This mythology has to do with the association, amongst certain races, of epilepsy with the idea of flying. Perhaps the airman is an epileptic certainly he is homosexual, and also a kleptomaniac. The *Journal* leaves one in no doubt that his uncle was homosexual, and on this fact centres the ancestor relationship.

The airman symbolizes the homosexual, because, so him, he is incapable of exploiting the old, fixed relationships he has involuntarily broken away from the shackles of the past and is compelled to experiment in new forms. His life, being comparatively disinterested, may result in an experiment of value to society, so long as he does not become obsessed with his own personal problem. His chief danger is his remarkable irresponsibility which leads him to indulge in Fascist day-dreams of fantastic and murderous practical jokes. The airman, therefore, with his bird's-eye view of society, sees everywhere the enemy. The most brilliant passages in the book are those in which he classifies the enemy.

We are never, of course, told directly who it

is, but only (i) how he behaves, (ii) symptoms by which we may recognize his influence on individuals, (iii) how, regarding him as a disease, we may recognize his symptoms in ourselves

The study of his behaviour is very largely an ingenious application of the Marxist analysis of capitalist society. E.g. 'The effect of the enemy is to introduce inert velocities into the system (called by him laws or habits) interfering with organization. These can only be removed by friction (war). Hence the enemy's interest in peace societies.'

This is a brilliant but partial application of the Marxian conception of history. But it is not a formula. It is a generalization which is also a very striking psychological observation of behaviour.

Combined with Marxism is psychology, and a very acute analysis of the behaviour of individuals. The 'enemy' sections are the strength and also the weakness of the *Journal*. They are strong because they contain the same true vision as does the wider, social observation. The weakness is, firstly, that the enemy tends to be too easily recognizable as one of several public school types. Secondly, that, in this context, psychology combined with Marxism tends to produce a peculiarly ingenious form of heresy-hunting. Heresy-hunting is not dangerous because one wishes in any way to spare the Enemy, but because it justifies narrow personal dislikes, universalizes petty criticism, and because in many cases it encourages a kind of masochistic self-abuse.

To say that the enemy is a public school type is perhaps too strong, but at any rate he is recognizably a member of the upper class.

'Three kinds of enemy walk—the grandiose stunt—the melancholic stagger—the paranoic sidle.

'Three kinds of enemy bearing—the condor stoop—the torid stupor—the robin's stance

"Three kinds of enemy face—the June bride—the favourite puss—the stone in the run.'

These are excellent descriptions of the kind of people whose pictures we see in society newspapers. One reads through another dozen or so, and one does not find one paragraph which would apply nearly so effectively to a member of the working class. One expects, therefore, that since the airman is out to defeat the enemy, he will find it ally among the class exploited by him. But not a bit of it. All the airman has is one or two people whom he can respect. Derek, a girl called E.

'But are there not after all some houses to which all this does not apply?' Cases of immunity, queer to research, but quite authentic?

'Here a home, rather than name which the enemy will employ any circumlocution, there a figure he will cross the street to avoid, assume an interest in a barber's window rather than meet that incorruptible eye. The Hollies, for instance, their most intrepid would steer clear of though disobeying the most urgent order. So far I have said nothing to E.'

So really we are back at the position of saying that just a few people whom we approve of are 'our set'. We have read through all the enemy characteristics, and they don't apply to our friends or not seriously. We are with Rimbaud in hating bourgeois morality: if we had been young men twenty years ago perhaps we would have volunteered to go out to Mexico with D. H. Lawrence, and start a little colony, but it is too late for that now. We are the intelligent.

A. The weakness of the enemy captions is that they apply to the people whom one doesn't like. One's own

little set draws closer together, only occasionally uniting to hound out one of their number whom the others recognize as the enemy

But Auden is not quite so simple as that (not so simple and abusive as Ezra Pound in his Cantos, for instance), because

(iii) there are the enemy symptoms in ourselves

'Three warnings of enemy attack—depression in the mornings—rheumatic twinges—blips on the face.

'Three symptoms in convalescence—nail-biting—nightmares—short sight

'Three results of an enemy victory — impotence — cancer—paralysis.'

Some of the definitions of enemy activities also have the same uncomplacent note of self-criticism.

'Of the enemy's definitions by Negation

'*Unless* you do well you will *not* be loved

'I'm *afraid* of death (instead of *I* want to live)

'Pleasure is the *decrease* of pain (olives—whisky)'

The airman's means of attack is the practical joke organized on a gigantic scale. The end of his *Journal* is full of such fantasies. 'At the pre-arranged zero hour the widow bent into a hoop with arthritis gives the signal for attack by unbending on the steps of St Philip's. A preliminary bombardment by obscene telephone messages destroys the *morale* already weakened by predictions of defeat made by wireless-controlled crows and card-packs. Shock troops equipped with wire-cutters, spanners and stink-bombs, penetrating the houses by infiltration, silence all alarm-clocks, screw down the bathroom taps, and remove plugs and paper from the lavatories.'

The principle of the airman is, of course, to shock, although his methods are also partly a satire on established Fascist methods. It is an extension of Rimbaud's

mockery of everything bourgeois. The airman believes, as Rimbaud believed, and as Shaw is a young man believed, that a shock organized on a sufficiently large scale will upset the private mental associations of the enemy, and thus destroy his belief in himself. 'Practical jokes are in every sense contradictory and public, e.g. my bogus lecture to the London Truss Club.'

After indulging in fantastic dreams of violence, the airman suddenly goes back on these Fascist plans. 'My whole life has been mistaken, progressively more and more complicated, instead of finally simple.'

He decides that violence is wrong because:

'(1) The power of the enemy is a function of our resistance, therefore

'(2) the only efficient way to destroy it—self-destruction, the sacrifice of all resistance, reducing him to the state of a man trying to walk on a frictionless surface

'(3) Conquest can only proceed by absorption of, i.e., infection by, the conquered. The true significance of my hands "Do not imagine that you, no more than any other conqueror, escape the mark of grossness" They stole to force a hearing.'

The airman's end is now not far off. The last entry in his *Journal* is that his 'hands are in perfect order.' So he has triumphed, but it is a secret victory. We have seen him torn between ideals of revolution, ideas of religion, and ideas of cure. The acceptance of his hands, which is followed by the hands being in perfect order, is his psychological victory.

The airman, being who he is, is bound to fail, because he is alone. So long as he is alone he is bound, like pacifists, to answer war by non-resistance of a kind which he believes to be anti-toxin. That is, as long as

the airman's observations, whilst they make an enemy of the governing class, do not find an ally in any other class. There is never any really revolutionary issue in *The Airman's Journal*, because the airman has no friends.

The airman is particularly interesting because he is, in fact, in much the same position as the contemporary writer who hates the social system under which he exists, and lives, and writes in a dream of violence on behalf of himself and his friends. He is ignored by the greatest part of society, and neither directly nor indirectly does his work penetrate to it. Yet he may represent the most intelligent and critical forces in society. Supposing that he is living in a society that is self-destructive and actively preparing for war, he seems to be completely powerless. His elimination is *no loss* to society, as Fascist governments have discovered who have been able to dispose of all the groups representing culture in their countries, because this culture had no deep roots in the life of the whole people. The airman and the artist is, like Roderick Hudson, just dangerously and acutely himself, apart from the rest of the world, isolated in his sensibility. Yet without him civilization is only a name.

He has, therefore, like the airman, got to defeat the enemy. There are two methods of attack. The first is to become an active political agent, to take part in the immense practical joke of destruction. But then he is using the enemy's own weapons. he will become an enemy to the enemy, and, besides that, his hands steal. The second is to learn how he may escape from his own isolation; not to resist the enemy, but to absorb him. To make an art that is infected by—that is about—society, and which it is impossible for society to discard,



because it is essentially a part of it, and to make it a part which will transform the whole

One sees then in *The Orators*, the victory of the idea of a psychological cure, which is always predominant as an aspect of Auden's work. But this is followed in *The Dance of Death* by a violent swing-over to the other, the revolutionary, idea. The theme of this play is stated in the prologue, which is made by an Announcer: 'We present to you this evening a picture of the decline of a class, of how its members dream of a new life, but secretly desire the old, for there is death inside them. We show you that death as a dancer.' The chorus then murmurs, from behind the curtain, 'Our death.' The chorus belongs to the same class as that satirized in *The Orators*. These people are shown in various ridiculous attitudes—sun-bathing, turning Fascist, in night clubs, abandoning their young women, engaged in flight from the alone to the Alone, trying always to keep the dancer, who represents their death, alive. The class is the propertied class, who reply, to the suggestion that they should become Communist, with Fascism.

'AUDIENCE One, two, three, four,  
The last war was a bosses' war  
Five, six, seven, eight,  
Rise and make a workers' state  
Nine, ten, eleven, twelve,  
Seize the factories and run them yourself

B It's 'is fault I told you so

AUDIENCE [*pointing at DANCER*]

Put him out Put him out

CHORUS You are responsible

You are impossible,

Out you go

We will liquidate,  
The capitalist state  
Overthrow

AUDIENCE Atta boys

MANAGER Do something, man,  
As quick as you can  
Prevent such behaviour  
And be our saviour  
Get us out of this trouble  
As I guarantee  
My theatre will double  
Your salary

[DANCER *dances as the demagogue* THE CHORUS *lose their menacing attitude and become fascinated*

Having refused to accept the Communist solution, the Dancer dies, but not before he has made his will

'He leaves his body, he leaves his wife,  
He leaves the years, he leaves the life,  
For the power and the glory of his kingdom they  
must pass

To work their will among the working class '

- The play closes to a dead march, with Karl Marx pronouncing that 'The instruments of production have been too much for him He is liquidated '

The position of this play then is complementary, but not contradictory, to *The Orators* What the play does is not to make a propagandist assertion, but to state a situation The statement is not irreconcilable with the position of *The Orators* Each book states, as it were, a hypothesis, and the two hypotheses enable the writer to achieve his picture of the whole contemporary scene If one asks at what point that synthesis is achieved, I



And I yet land to celebrate with you  
 Birth of a natural order and of love,  
 With you enjoy the untransfigured scene,  
 My father down the garden in his gaiters,  
 My mother at her bureau writing letters,  
 Free to our favours, all our titles gone '

In such poetry one can see the opposing ideas fused into one single idea, so that the contradictions of some of the other poems disappear completely.

## E PILOGUE

IN this book I have tried to show that, apart from all questions of tendency, there is, in our modern literature, a consistent tradition of writing that has a political-moral subject

Essentially, James's last novels, Eliot's poems, Owen's poems, and Upward's two short stories, present different aspects of the same political subject

The political subject has undergone transformations, because at one time it seemed primarily the duty of the individual to escape from his environment, and, with a few others who cared about such things, to preserve, in isolation, the values of our civilization. The impulse of the character in James's story, who cherishes her Altar of the Dead, is the same as that of Lawrence when, in his letters, he asks friends to emigrate with him in order to found some settlement, where they would make the beginning of a new life. The woman in James's story had her vision of the flaming altar which was the end of a civilization, Lawrence had his vision of the plot of land which was the beginning of a new one. What they both cared for was civilization.

To other writers, as we see in *The Waste Land*, the only reasonable act was to immerse themselves in 'the destructive element'. The escape of the few offered no attractions. The alternative to such an escape was to accept the fact that our civilization is without faith, decaying, and in some ways barbaric.

The third attitude is that of the man in Upward's story who desires a revolution to remove 'the more obvious

material evils' of the world. He clearly means much more than this.

These attitudes all serve to present in lively and significant ways the most serious subject possible to writing.

Beyond this indication of a common subject, a consistent political tradition, there are certain conclusions to be drawn

The first is that the 'tendency' is always subsidiary to the whole subject. The tendency at most is a selecting instrument which directs the writer to a certain aspect of the subject

Tendencies in themselves are of no literary interest

They are of no interest because art does not illustrate a point of view, it does not illustrate at all, it presents its subject in a new form

Observation should be external and real. The thing observed in a poem or a work of fiction should refer to something outside the poem, in the same way as nature poetry refers to a background of nature. Otherwise, it is not observation, it is illustration

Poetry is a language which can communicate simply and directly experiences that are not directly communicable in ordinary language. A single poem by Wilfred Owen communicates, immediately and convincingly, experiences that the reader may never have shared, and which certainly are not communicated, although they may be imagined by inferring them, in any other book about the War. Further, poetry often communicates when one does not fully understand it, and even when written in a language which one knows very imperfectly

The imagist poets seem to have thought that the creation, in words, of a beautiful image was an end in itself, as though the image had an existence of its own, which was isolated from experience and the external world.

But imagery is the urgent medium by which experience holds our attention. A great part of the behaviour of the most ordinary people is dictated by some image of themselves which they hold in their minds. Everyone has in his consciousness images of birth, death, sex, and every kind of experience, but for the greater part of their lives they are scarcely conscious of this imagery.

But the poet must be conscious of the profound significance and meaning of imagery: his imagery must be true. Images are not still-lives to be hung on walls. They are visions of the history of the race and of life and death.

These are rough signs only. But they may help to show that certain conclusions can be drawn, if we accept the hypothesis that literature is a means of understanding the profoundest and most moral changes in the human mind.

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